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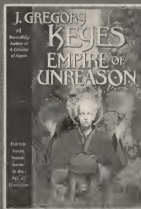
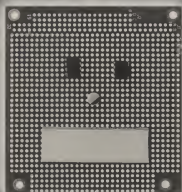
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Compare and Contrast: The Grapes of Wrath vs. Dragonlance

I don't often make letters to the editor the subject of their own editorials, but in this case, I just couldn't resist.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I'm sending this letter in response to the Letters section of the October 2000 issue. I'd just like to highlight a couple of things.

First and foremost I must applaud Suzanne Weiner. I am also 17 and in IB (International Baccalaureate) English XI in which we just completed *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck (sic) and most recently, *Native Son* by Richard Wright. While both novels were somewhat interesting, they do not even come close to comparing to the "old-school" *Dragonlance* series (that is, pre-fifth age novels). I've been a constant reader since kindergarten and I read one *Dragonlance* novel every week for months.

The school system always chooses what I term "real world" literature. For instance, *Native Son* is, more or less, one gigantic comparison between the African American and Caucasian races. Certainly this is an important issue, but I believe its significance is dying out. I for one have many friends from all sorts of races, as does most of my generation. Nevertheless, I believe that modern educators are over concerned with such problems that they experienced as young adults. Not a single grade has gone by in my schooling in which my class did not read a book concerned with the sufferings of a various people. Everything we read in school is depressing. It is almost as if the school system is training us to fill the roles of sheep while the more "privileged" students become the shepherds. I have seen this come true even in the highly respected International Baccalaureate program. Secondly, English teachers have actually discouraged me from reading authors who write outside the traditional "high school-appropriate" areas. Any literature that could be considered offensive to anyone was never allowed. God forbid that we should be permitted to discuss things that make us think deeper than rising action, climax, falling action! I for one am deeply looking forward to college where I hope to be able to discuss whatever literature I choose.

Now that I am finished griping about education ... or lack thereof, I would like to propose a writing contest. I'm sure there are lots of other prospective writers who read your magazine every two months and dream about having their work published in its

pages. I propose that an amateur writing contest be held in which perhaps ten pieces are selected as winners and two published every month. I'm sure you can set lots of other rules and restrictions on it, but I would love to read what other fantasy enthusiasts have to say as well as to have the chance to submit some of my own work.

Sincerely,
Bryan Jones

Bryan, I'm pleased that you're so devoted to speculative literature, but let me assure you, as as a Hugo-winning editor and the founding editor of this magazine: There is no comparison between *The Grapes of Wrath* and the *Dragonlance* series. It's a travesty even to mention them in the same sentence! *The Grapes of Wrath* is one of the most important treasures of American literature. The *Dragonlance* series is ... not. And as for *Native Son*—well, I'm delighted that you live in a Utopia where all races, creeds, and religions mingle harmoniously without any friction or harsh words among them. However, even if you never set foot outside your community (have you read *The Giver*?) there is the small matter of history. These things—the Great Depression, racism, genocide—did happen and are happening right now in our country and all around the world. Saying that they are "depressing" won't make them go away. As Santayana said, "Those who do not remember history are doomed to repeat it."

(I'm also sorry to have to be the one to break this to you, but you won't be discussing *Dragonlance* in college. There are very few curricula that even deal with "important" SF and fantasy writers. There are some schools which offer courses in SF and Fantasy literature, so if it's important to you, you might want to look for them.)

As far as your contest suggestion goes, back our first year, I wrote a tongue-in-cheek editorial suggesting that we were running a short story contest in every issue. Winners got paid for their stories and the stories were published in the magazine. I got tons of stories addressed to "Short Story Contest" and rejected them all, since anyone who missed the point of that editorial didn't deserve to win it. Every issue is a "contest." People send their stories in to me. I pick the best six out of the approximately three hundred I get each month. I pay the authors, known or unknown, and publish the stories. That's what this magazine is all about!

Shawna McCarthy

REALMS OF FANTASY

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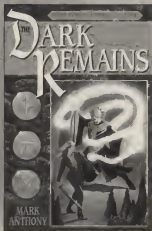
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Letters

Dear *Realms of Fantasy*,

I have been a subscriber for just a few issues but I have felt quite at home with your publication. I was delighted to have one of my favorite authors mentioned in "Mom and Dad at the Home Front" (August 2000). I have been reading Joy Chant since *Black Moon*, *Red Mountain* was released, and have copies of both *Grey Mane of Morning* and *The High Kings*. Perhaps *Realms* would consider an article by or about her?

Imagine my surprise when I discovered another of my favorite books listed in the Books to Watch For section in the October issue. This past summer I purchased new paperback copies of both *Return to Gone-Away*, and *Gone-Away Lake*. Even as a youngster I was surprised that the Disney Corporation hadn't made a movie or two out of those delightful books. I hope other readers will take the suggestion and pick up those two books; most libraries will also have copies in the children's collection.

Another question: Has *Realms of Fantasy* done an article on the Ballantine Adult Fantasy series Lin Carter edited in the late 1960s and early 1970s? Although Mr. Carter died in 1988 I would think there is an expert out there who would love to talk about this fantastic series. I own quite a few of the original titles and have kept up with some of the new discoveries. I understand *Gormenghast* is coming to PBS soon. An article about it would be timely.

Sincerely,
Alison M. Walters
Charlotte, MI

Dear RoF,

I'm an avid fan of the contents of your magazine but I've always had trouble with the cover—and the latest (October 2000) just beat them all. OK if its dragons, unicorns, barbarians, etc. Although a little stereotypical, they are, after all, connected to what the general public perceives as Fantasy. But is it really necessary to have so many single posing bimbos in extremely skimpy, and only-useful-for-making-men drool, outfits? Especially this latest cover made me slightly embarrassed when I was buying it, since it looked like something more appropriate for an S&M magazine. If an avid fan like me felt uncomfortable buying a copy, think of what the effect must be for other Fantasy lovers that haven't discovered your magazine's creamy center yet. Why don't you use art from the artists you review, which is what Sci-Fi Age did, at least for a while.

Yours truly,
Anna Troy
Uppsala, Sweden

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Realms of Fantasy is a welcome visitor in my home. The August cover lives up to the rest of a perfect magazine. Please, please no more sleazy chain-mail-clad creatures of a sado-masochist's nightmare (i.e. October 2000). Aren't there so many possible subjects for cover art? Think castles-in-the-mist, trolls, ogres, etc. Your illustrations for the stories have always been superb, and the August cover by Gustafson will proudly grace my coffee table long after I have devoured its contents.

Most sincerely,
Bruce Moffitt
Brookfield, MO

Dear Ms. McCarthy et al.

Very sexy stuff on the October cover. I confess that I only bought the magazine because I like the fiction and reviews within and the "winsome" wench on the front did not influence my decision to purchase (ha). Enjoyed Gahan's pages the most and wanted to mention that I have noticed a number of repeat authors in your magazine ... especially enjoy reading Richard Parks, M. Shayne Bell, Peni Griffin, and Tanith Lee and Jane Yolen. (Bring on more of those two!) Keep up the good work!

Jack Fischer
Providence, RI

October's cover was the cover that launched a thousand letters. Well, quite a few anyway. Most in the vein of these—more con than pro. When we are making the decision to feature a piece of artwork on our cover, we often query the office staff for their opinions (both male and female). We have rejected covers over the years on the basis they might be offensive to some people—and we do try to be fairly balanced in promoting warrior dudes along with the warrior females. (Although we rarely, if ever, get complaints regarding semi-clad male torsos!) We love to stock our magazine with great and informative articles, entertaining and literary fiction, and unique and exciting artwork—but we do also love it when the magazine leaps off the newsstand, so to speak. A great deal of our subscribers are apparently mature females. A great portion of our newsstand sales come from teenage males. We try to straddle the fence and please a diverse and intelligent group of readers. If we can't always please our readers as a whole—we do welcome your thoughts in this Letters to the Editor forum and we take your concerns, praise, and criticisms quite to heart.

Your letters are welcome. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, *Realms of Fantasy*, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, E-mail to: slavemam896@aol.com

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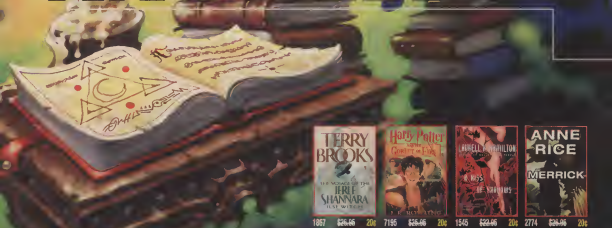


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Bringing Steven King novels to the big screen does not guarantee success.

HOW DO THE FANTASY FILMS BASED ON THE BOOKS OF STEPHEN KING COMPARE WITH the books themselves? They don't. With the possible exception of director Stanley Kubrick, no filmmaker, including King himself, has managed to translate to the big screen the palpable, claustrophobic loathing that permeates his works of Fantasy. And when television gets hold of them, forget about it. How does *Storm of the Century* stack up against *The Shining*? It doesn't. Want to compare Misery with *The Tommyknockers*? Don't bother. To prove the point, perhaps an examination of movies based on King's non-Fantasy work is in order.

The track record shows that films based on the author's non-Horror output are far better than those drawn from his Horror oeuvre. When pressed, no less a talent than screenwriter William Goldman (*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *The Princess Bride*) was quick to name *The Shawshank Redemption* as one of the 10 best films of the '90s. Director Frank Darabont's adaptation of King's novel is top-flight filmmaking from start to finish, featuring fine and unfairly underrated performances from Tim Robbins and Morgan Freeman. Greeted with mostly mediocre reviews when released, the film has developed something of a cult status, and critic Roger Ebert reassessed it as "a modern classic" when review-

ing Darabont's latest film, *The Green Mile*, also based on a series of King best-sellers. The Fantasy elements in *The Green Mile* are, admittedly, crucial but nonetheless minimal as far as plot and character motivation are concerned. It's just shy of being a four-star picture, marred only by a "tie-up-the-loose-strings" ending that seems tacked on (possibly after a negative reaction to a test screening). But what goes before is almost three hours of

RIGHT: The lady in red: Carrie put King on the map and sparked Sissy Spacek's career.

FAR RIGHT: The movie *The Green Mile* is considered flawless storytelling.



near-flawless storytelling—unabashedly sentimental and genuinely stirring stuff. The modern era's most bankable star, two-time Academy Award-winner Tom Hanks, delivers a performance far more Oscar-worthy than those he was rewarded for previously. In fact, every role is perfectly cast. Every line of dialogue feels genuine. More important (and more germane to this appraisal), the overriding themes of both *Shawshank* and *Green Mile* are life-affirming and positive, in addition to being terrific entertainments. Those aren't qualities I'd associate with a Horror movie.

Apt Pupil (1998), based on a King story, might be cited as a Horror film as it deals with Nazi war crimes perpetrated during the Holocaust and a bizarre plot to cover up a murder. Sir Ian McKellan was lauded for a chilling, snaky performance as the neighbor of young Brad Renfro. It's creepy stuff, but is it Horror? More important, was it any good? Critics who'd championed director Bryan Singer's previous effort, the top-notch thriller *The Usual Suspects*, were quick to dismiss this film as a trifle.

How about *Misery*? It's probably the best film based on a King book. William Goldman's script is taut as a

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Jack Nicholson in Stanley Kubrick's version of *The Shining*.



drumhead, and Rob Reiner's knack for conveying suspense is surprisingly deft. Between the two of them, not a single frame of film is wasted. Kathy Bates is appropriately over the top (and subsequently won an Oscar) as deranged nurse Annie Wilkes. James Caan, to everyone's surprise, gives a restrained performance, and the always-reliable Richard Farnsworth is absolutely terrific as the local lawman. Some might call it a Horror flick. It is scary as hell, but it has no supernatural elements. Key scenes are served up with knuckle-whitening suspense, but I wouldn't call it a Horror film.

How about *Dolores Claiborne*? It's dark and suspenseful; a sense of foreboding hangs over every scene as it chronicles the ravages of

child and spousal abuse and the horror involved in coming to grips with them. The cast tackles the material earnestly and all too believably. Jennifer Jason Leigh is ideally cast as the young woman with the horrific and haunting secret, and Kathy Bates was never better as the mother who seeks to protect her child by any means necessary. The themes are horrifying, but does that make it a Horror film? Significantly, those themes reverberate through much of King's work. Specifically, children at risk, children abused, children endangered, and lots of children living in corn fields, as I recall. More on that later.

King's knack for interpreting the way a child processes the horrific things happening around him or her just might be the key to

King's Worst

What are the five worst movies based on Stephen King's work? With 50-plus films of widely varying quality to wade through, I'm not about to claim that this is the definitive list. I'll offer up their merits (or lack of them), you screen the flicks and judge for yourself.

You'll notice that the list is comprised mostly of sequels, as producers seem unable to resist the temptation to parlay their profits from low-budget pictures by churning out a sequel with name recognition—and little else—going for it. With that in mind, it's likewise difficult for your reviewer to resist the temptation to list the first five *Children of the Corn* films and wrap up this article quickly. It would be just as easy to

name any five of the umpty-ump TV movies adapted from King's work. But you're not getting off that easily, so let's begin with the *Corn* canon collectively.



1 *Children of the Corn 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6* (they all have colons followed by subtitles, which I'll forego in the interest of brevity).

The first entry actually had a creepy moment or

two. Then, as is often the case when a modestly budgeted film turns a tidy profit, "sequelitis" sets in—and it hasn't let up yet. The latest entry in the *Corn* series, starring Stacy Keach, is debuting on video as this is written.

2 *Storm of the Century*. A tumultuous pop-culture conflict was created when this much-hyped thriller was scheduled against George Clooney's *E.R.* farewell. If you went with Clooney, you only lost an hour of your life as opposed to the 247 minutes (plus commercials!) it took to unwrap this clichéd thriller. All that timeworn mumbo jumbo involving Satanic emissaries and messages scrawled in blood—forget it.

3 *The Rage; Carrie 2*. "Sequelitis" strikes again—but what left me scratching my head

the author's phenomenally popular success. Does that make them great books? I'll leave that to more qualified judges. But the identification of the child theme does bring us back to director Rob Reiner. King's story "The Body" served as the basis for Reiner's 1986 film *Stand By Me*. At the story's core is the way in which four pre-teen pals deal emotionally with their discovery of a corpse. It hardly sounds like the basis for a nostalgic, bittersweet look at growing up in the 1950s, but that's just what Reiner concocted. The film was a sleeper hit, but not without its drawbacks. The framing device of Richard Dreyfuss as one of the kids, all grown up and a successful author, is largely unnecessary and, for the life of me, I don't know why it's called *Stand By Me*. (Maybe just an excuse to use a cool song.) Bottom line: Is it a Horror movie? Nope.

So, when do we get to the Horror stuff? First, let's summarize: *The Green Mile*, *The Shawshank Redemption*, *Misery*, Dolores Claiborne, *Apt Pupil*, *Stand By Me*. All highly regarded in one way or another. "A" list actors, top-drawer directors, Academy Awards, and big budgets. It begs a question: Why wasn't such loving care lavished on *Cujo* or *Firestarter*? Thinner bombed with little fanfare, and *The Mangler* went straight to video. It might be that Horror films are still thought of as cheap entertainment, meant only to deliver a quick scare and a large return on a small investment. It's important to point out that the outrageous budgets and proud promotional campaigns indicative of

contemporary Horror are a relatively recent phenomenon. Take, for instance, *The Shining*. It's regarded by many as something of a modern Horror classic. But when originally released, the film was received with indifference. Some critics hastened to accuse director Stanley Kubrick of "slumming." In retrospect, popular opinion regarding the film is far kinder, and it is rightfully seen as one of the best adaptations of a Stephen King story. The sense of isolation is palpable, and Kubrick's knack for overlighting a scene works to the film's advantage. Everyone expects scary things to pop out of the shadows, but when they suddenly appear in a brightly lit room, that makes us all feel at risk. In other words, absence of darkness is no guarantee of safety. Who can forget the little kid tooling through the endless corridors of the hotel on his Big Wheel, suddenly coming upon the ghosts of murdered twin girls?

And then TV had to remake it in 1997—under the auspices of King himself—as a miniseries, yet, making an already dangerously long story potentially boring. In place of Nicholson we get Steven Weber. I'm not the world's biggest Nicholson fan, viewing him as something of a one-trick pony, wavering between hysteria and angry sarcasm in any given performance—but Steven Weber? Worse still, Shelley Duvall is replaced by glamorous Rebecca DeMornay! Astonishingly, most critics were kind to the new version. But regardless of what you think of the film, why remake it? The original was no 2001, but it was suspenseful—and you're not



with the material, while Michael Gornick replaces George Romero in the director's chair.

5 *Pet Sematary II*. If you have cable, then you already know that there was a "Pet Sematary" and a "Pet Sematary II", both of which play nonstop on the "All Pet Sematary" channel (check local listings). Granted, as Horror premises go, the original *Sematary* broke little new ground, and the casting in the sequel is marginally more interesting than the first film, with *Terminator II*'s Edward Furlong front and center. However, the connection to the first film is tenuous. Mary Lambert, who'd previously helmed episodes of *Tales From the Crypt*, as well as a cable remake of the 1950's, J.D. classic *Dragstrip Girl*, directed both *Pet* projects. **ie**

was why it took 23 years to get this flick made. It isn't like the cult status of *Carrie* has grown over the years. It achieved that standing upon release. The time to pounce was the late-'70s, early-'80s, slasher-film heyday. Amy Irving reprises her role from the original, if that piques your interest, but don't count on this unwarranted sequel to deliver the same scares as the first film.

4 *Creepshow 2*. Bitten, once again, by the sequel bug. The original was loads of fun but by no measure a great film. This too-late follow-up couldn't hope to duplicate the unique mix of mayhem and humor found in the first film. Two or three credible actors (George Kennedy, Dorothy Lamour, Hal Holbrook) are willing to have some fun

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going to out-Kubrick Kubrick. This lackluster remake clearly demonstrates that Hollywood has no idea what to do with King's scary stories. What's more frightening is the fact that King doesn't seem to know, either!

The usually reclusive author actually made the rounds of late-night chat shows to tout the virtues of a miniseries (which he executive-produced) based on his *Storm of the Century*. The storm in question can be interpreted as:

- A: The blizzard that pounds an island hamlet off the coast of Maine where the "action" takes place.
- B: The bloody destruction wrought by a satanic figure on the local populace.
- C: The unrelenting storm of hype that ushered the movie onto the airwaves.

Whichever description you choose, the resultant film was a disappointment and, if I were to choose one word to describe it, that word would be loooong.

I've already described King as personally reclusive, but when it comes to screen time, it's a different story. The author has popped up in at least 14 of the films based on his writing, most notably as Jody Verrill in the segment of the anthology film *Creepshow* entitled "The Lonesome Death of Jody Verrill." Filmed in 1982, *Creepshow* was a good idea inspired by the precensorship Horror comic books published by EC Comics in the early 1950s. King's stories are obvious descendants and are well-realized in this film. Crucial to



Stephen King himself in "Creepshow."

the movie's enjoyability is a good-natured cast approaching the over-the-top material with gusto. Leslie Nielsen, Hal Holbrook, Fritz Weaver, E.G. Marshall, Adrienne Barbeau—all turn in memorable work. A 1987 sequel received scant notice, but the original remains good, gory fun. OK. A Stephen King Horror flick that's not bad. Now we're getting somewhere.

The Dead Zone came out the following year, holding a lot of promise for King fans and Horror lovers in general. Director David Cronenberg (*The Fly*, *Dead Ringers*) seemed well matched to the material. The casting would appear to be ideal—the always creepy Christopher Walken at his most unctuous,

Brooke Adams, Herbert Lom, Martin Sheen. So, what happened? The movie feels very disjointed and ambiguous—but I seem to be very much in the minority with that opinion. Many fans, and King himself, consider it one of the best realizations of his work. It's also important to point out that Cronenberg has made something of a specialty out of filming what many would deem unfilmable properties. Am I saying that King's Horror stories are too thematically complex to be successfully filmed? Nope. Only that his more linear, human-interest tales have been turned into better movies.

In fact, you have to go clear back to 1976 to find that ideal combination of simple story, characters we can all identify with, and genuinely spooky elements to find one of the most highly regarded "Stephen King" movies. *Carrie* put a lot of people, including King, on the map. It was director Brian DePalma's (*The Untouchables*, *Mission: Impossible*) 10th film, but it was his first to really turn any heads. An ethereal Sissy Spacek made her initial splash in the title role, and went on to win an Academy Award just four years later. Amy Irving and John Travolta also found fame and fortune not long afterward. It's hard to imagine anyone other than Spacek as the mousy, telekinetic teen whose public humiliation at the hands of cruel classmates results in the film's blood-drenched climax. (Producers found this out the hard way when *The Rage*: *Carrie* 2

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bombed in 1999.)

From here on, the list of passable Horror films based on King's books gets darned short. *Firestarter* has its advocates who cite the spooky turn by little Drew Barrymore. But forget the *Children of the Corn* franchise. The first in the series was kind of creepy, but nobody's idea of a fine film. You'd think that after a sequel or two, the box-office harvest would finally be in, but the sixth *Corn* movie only recently came out on video.

Cujo was marginally successful, and darned near anyone who's ever been nipped by a pooch can identify with Dee Wallace's horrified reaction to the deadly dog for whom the film is named—but a good movie? *Silver Bullet*, King's take on werewolves, starring a creepy, pre-Pentecostal Gary Busey wasn't much better and, while a lot of folks liked John Carpenter's filming of *Christine*, King's opus about a murderous car, what makes it any scarier than *Kill-Dozer*? (At least that one had Clint Walker and its own, short-lived comic book.) *Maximum Overdrive* marked the beginning and end of King's career as a movie director and, though some critics may have been unkind, the film has its stubborn supporters.

The Running Man was crafted into an Arnold Schwarzenegger vehicle that hardly ranks with the star's more successful action thrillers, and *Thinner*, while possessed of a sly sense of humor (I refer to Joe Mantegna's cagy performance as a racketeer and King's cameo as "Dr. Bangor"—Get it? Bangor, Maine?), sure came up short on suspense. Likewise, *Lawnmower Man* had some cool effects but bore little resemblance to King's story. (King, in fact, sued to have his name removed from the film.) And nobody had much use for *Needful Things*, which was pushed way over the top by an uncharacteristically hammy Max Von Sydow.

And then, God help us, there are the TV movies which, for all their stars and hype and bloated budgets, look like what they are—TV movies: *Golden Years*, *The Stand*, *The Tommyknockers*, *The Langoliers*, *Storm of the Century*—stop me when you've heard enough. You'd think that out of the 50-something films based on Stephen King's works, more than two—*Carrie* and *The Shining*—would have successfully combined King's literary flair for Horror with solid movie storytelling and come up with a winner. But I've very little doubt that there will be many future opportunities to get it right. Upcoming productions, based on King's writings, called *Stud City* and *Desperation 2000* have been announced and, though temporarily sidelined by a serious accident, I can't imagine one of the most prolific writers of modern times being out of the game for very long. Maybe, just maybe ...

Marty Baumann is the award-winning publisher of *The Astounding B Monster*—<http://www.bmonster.com>—and the adventures of *The Crater Kid*—<http://www.craterkid.com>



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A new collection debuts, saluting one of Fantasy's most prolific writers.

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS IS AT ONCE A SOURCE OF TREMENDOUS PLEASURE AND ENORMOUS annoyance to any serious devotee of Fantasy who encounters his works. From his contemporaries through Lovecraft and on to a good number of critics in periods thereafter, including both Hugh Lamb and S.T. Joshi—the compilers of these collections of Chambers' works under review here—variations of the same complaint are sounded again and again. The tone and emphasis may vary but the essential objection might be boiled down to: "He was obviously one of the most talented authors of fantastic Horror who ever took pen in hand as the best of his writings prove conclusively—why, in God's name, couldn't he work just a little harder at that smallish percentage of the work he wrote that was Fantasy and why didn't he write more of it so that we could now be relishing the stuff?"

One simple answer is that when he tasted the enormous commercial success that came very early on in his career he understandably wanted it to continue and

so, ever after, mostly structured his novels and stories to lure in more of the same. He cranked out huge numbers of huge books just exactly as "New York Times best-selling" authors do today and they are now all as totally forgotten as doubtless shall be the astounding and monstrous avalanche of door-stopper volumes currently being spewed.

The odd thing is that his initial hit, *The King in Yellow*, was a collection of short stories that were largely either fantastic Horror or danced around the edges of being such. The question of why, then, did he veer away from Fantasy arises, but I think it can be answered by pointing out that Chambers calculatedly tagged the core stories in *King* with the glamour of an already-successful author, Ambrose Bierce, by slipping in spooky references to his "Carcosa" and "Hastur." No great sin at all, but it does demonstrate the fact that, from the start, Chambers was the sort of author who carefully studies winners in the market and produces accordingly.

Whatever, particularly with the best short stories in *The King in Yellow* such as "The Yellow Sign" and "In the Court of the Dragon," Chambers proved beyond all doubt that he could write horrific Fantasy as only an extraordinarily select few have ever been able to do, and he continued to do so, but only with erratic displays of occasional genius which are quite amazingly better than the reams of surrounding hack work. He held to this pattern throughout his career up to and including the marvelous and spectacular flashes of the visionary wonders in his flamboyantly outrageous thriller *The Slayer of Souls*.

Three collections of Chambers' work have recently been published: *The Yellow Sign and Other Stories*, *The Complete Weird Tales of Robert W. Chambers* (edited and introduced by S. T. Joshi; Chaosium, Inc., Oakland, CA; 643 pages; trade-paperback; \$19.95); *Out of the Dark, Volume One: Origins* (by Robert W. Chambers; edited and introduced Hugh Lamb; Ash-Tree Press, Ashcroft, British Columbia; 163

The thief of Nifft must fight an alien spider god in Michael Shea's The A'Rak, reviewed by Paul DiFilippo. Cover painting by Gary Ruddell





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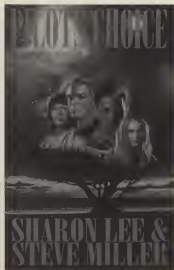
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pages; hardcover, \$38.50); *Out of the Dark, Volume Two: Diversions* (by Robert W. Chambers; edited and introduced by Hugh Lamb; Ash-Tree Press, Ashcroft, British Columbia; 199 pages; hardcover, \$39.50.) The Hugh Lamb collections are restricted to short stories that the Editor feels are especially worth preserving and, though I might have put in a few more personal favorites, I have no argument whatsoever with his selections. It's important to note that the second of his volumes also includes some particularly marvelous chapters from *The Slayer of Souls*. S.T. Joshi lacks any bits from this last source but compensates by gathering up every short-story Fantasy Chambers ever turned out, good or bad, so that the reader can plow through it all and pick out the good bits for himself.

As far as the introductions are concerned I rather incline to Lamb's judgments over Joshi's, but all are full of information most helpful and illuminating to anyone interested in this extraordinarily talented but subtly tragic literary figure.

Through the years I have read a good number of Christopher Moore's witty novels and am happy to report that it seems to me he is getting better and better at doing them which is impressive since the early ones were pretty good and a lesser humorist might have been quite reasonably satisfied with them and content to stay put. Moore has worked hard at making his plots run smoother, flesh out the characters more convincingly, make those characters' interrelationships more complex and to all around deepen and enrich his work.

The Lust Lizard of Melancholy Cove (Avon Books, NYC; trade paperback; 304 pp; \$13.00) is his latest and, I think, his best.

In it he skillfully and amusingly sketches out one of those quaintly little California tourist-attraction communities, populates it with deftly drawn eccentrics and equips them with more than enough intriguing quirks to keep you interested and wondering what foolishness they'll be up to next.

The novel starts as Pine Cove goes off-season, the shops clear their shelves of kitsch and postcards, and the locals are finally able to relax in the blessed absence of tourists. Then—following the essential basis of humor which is that things never work out as you hoped they would—this growing tranquility is first seriously marred by a suicide and then demolished in stages by the invasion of an ancient sea dragon looking for a little food and, hopefully, some casual sex.

Although the book is full of interesting male characters including bluesman Catfish Jefferson (who earned his nickname in a manner most pertinent to the present events) and Irving Nailsworth (Pine Cove's Police creepy information officer who mercilessly

barbers his endless knowledge of everybody's secrets for dope and the more poisonous varieties of fast food), they are—with the exception of a brutish villain or two—somewhat passive types, oftentimes to the



point of near perpetual floundering, while a good many of the women are driven forces of nature and positively alarming in their impact. They struck me as being considerably more interesting and deeply drawn, to have more resonance, more feeling of presence and—since their hopes and fears are considerably more profound and far more complicated than the relatively simple aspirations of the males—they end up being considerably funnier.

One of the two main women is a psychiatrist who, suddenly haunted by the awful feeling she's been ignoring the solemn obligations of her calling, breaks all known rules and carries out a well-intentioned but tremendously misbegotten medical experiment upon the general population which is all the more amusing for being so highly plausible that I deeply suspect I have been in several communities where such a plan was in effect.

The other lead female—and she is a fine creation—is Molly Michon, a former Scream Queen who has been driven more than slightly mad by her present submergence in obscurity but who discovers during the unfolding of the plot that her film career playing *Kendra*, the *Warrior Babe* of the *Outland* in cheapie creature features has been

superb training for dragon management.

I can attest from personal experience that if you are fortunate enough to have a copy of *The Lust Lizard of Melancholy Cove* with you, you can transform a thoroughly Christopher Moore sort of airline trip featuring multiple mystery cancellations, eerily repeated delays, dangerously restive passengers, zombie stewardesses, and funny burned little things wrapped in aluminum for lunch into a pleasant—make that *really enjoyable*—trip.

I don't know what more you can ask.

Although Edith Nesbit produced her work away back in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, her delightful children's novels such as *The Railway Children* continue to be well beloved today and most of them are still in print and easily accessible.

Unfortunately her ghost stories—which had been very widely read and praised when she wrote them—dropped entirely out of sight, save for occasional appearances in anthologies (in which she sometimes was given the wrong first name) until the excellent and apparently inexhaustible Hugh Lamb gallantly came to their rescue with a collection a few years back and has now been thoughtful enough to follow it up with *In The Dark* (Ash-Tree Press, Ashcroft, British Columbia; 223 pp; hardcover, \$41.50), an expanded version now out from Ash-Tree Press.

The haunting dead in most of Nesbit's spectral tales are decidedly not of the filmy sort constructed from drifting ectoplasmic wisps; they are, to the contrary, so solid that one of the most famous of them is actually whittled out of stone.

Also there is an almost Lovecraftian lack of morality in her Horror tales. It does not matter to her if the victims of her haunts are not proper villains and richly deserve the ghastly doom approaching them as it did to authors of most of the Victorian spookers, particularly those of the female persuasion, nor will being a virtuous, yea, near-saintly sort help in the slightest to deter awful damage from her supernatural menaces. Even being a totally neutral bystander will not deter Ms. Nesbit's ghastly entities from tracking you down and having their horrid way with you if that is their whim.

Another important thing about the dead stalkers in many of her most effectively bone-chilling tales is that each and every one of them is most decidedly and convincingly dead. They smell like they are dead, they walk like they are dead, they even smile like they are dead.

In his typically fine introduction Lamb cites two hideously traumatic events which probably helped no end in making Nesbit such a superb animator of malicious cadavers:

The first is that when she was a tiny child some idiotic grownup actually took the poor dear to see no less than a collection of two hundred mummified corpses standing (stiffly, one presumes) in the vault of a church in Bordeaux. One is torn between gratitude for the presumably well-intentioned holiday planner's helping to inspire Nesbit to write some of the scariest short stories ever penned and a burning desire to hop into an H.G. Wellsian time machine (Lamb also mentions that Wells, who admired Nesbit's writing enormously, thought she was a man up until the moment he met her) and break the silly bastard's nose before his or her tiny charge is permanently warped.

The second trauma occurred when a relative of hers had actually been all dolled up and placed in his coffin before some alert soul present noticed the poor bastard was still alive and I think all hands will pretty much agree that that one rather completely explains how she managed to hit upon and was able to so successfully execute certain of her most effectively shocking tales.

The straightforwardness of her menaces carries through to her style of presenting them. She takes a crisp and no-nonsense approach which is written with beautiful but unsparing clarity. There are no diversionary meanderings, we are walked where she wishes us to walk, her hand gently but firmly on our elbow, to the awful revelation.

As a sample let me quote a paragraph or two from the end of a story which has always been one of my favorites, "The Pavilion":

"Take the candle," said Amelia, and he took it obediently. Amelia was touching what lay on the bench. Suddenly she screamed. Just one scream, not very loud. But Frederick remembers just how it sounded. Sometimes he hears it in dreams and wakes moaning, though he is an old man now and his old wife says: 'What is it, dear?' and he says: 'Nothing, my Ernestine, nothing.'"

You will very rarely come upon as good a collection of short stories as chillingly and expertly written as these.

Every so often some obliging soul at Sovereign Media, the publishers of *Realms of Fantasy*, sends me a paper carton full of books and I open it and always go through its contents very carefully because I have learned that often the first look and feel of a book can be extremely misleading.

They can be beautifully and expensively bound and dust-jacketed with fine, creamy paper inside which is a joy to touch and sniff at, but that does not mean its contents are of a similar quality, nor does it mean they are not.

On the other hand they may be grungy paperbacks with cluttered covers and pages thin enough to see through made of high acid paper already turning grayish yellow, but that also does not mean that its contents are fully as repulsive as their surroundings or a very good book which has had some very

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My Favorite Horror Story (edited by Mike Baker and Martin H. Greenberg; Daw Books, Inc., NYC; 303 pp; paperback; \$6.99) is, sadly, all too aptly described by the last line in the latter category above. The concept of the book is a long way from new but most of the books I have seen employing it seem to be so casually heaved together one is often highly suspicious that the stories chosen really haven't got all that much to do with their supposed choosers. In this collection of favorites, however, there is no question of authenticity. The disturbing stories in it are very personally introduced by the disturbing writers who were profoundly influenced by them and it is obvious they love them passionately. No lesser word will do.

The result is we have not only one of the best wide-ranging collections of tried-and-true Horror stories I have seen in a very long time, we also have a very revealing and genuinely touching document on some of the best practitioners of the art currently among us.

Some of the choices are what you would probably have on a short list of guesses such as Joyce Carol Oates' nomination of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart"; some are initially surprising but become extremely logical once you think about it such as Dennis Eichson's selection of Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"; all of them speak thick volumes about their choosers.

Since they are all love letters from the very heart, all the introductions are both clear looks at the authors and extremely moving

documents. They are also packed full of meaty insights on writing which ought to be most useful for anyone musing on the possibility of trying their hand at the game.

There are also all kinds of highly revealing little bits of biography and not just a small amount of odd esoterica. For example: Harlan Ellison convincingly proving that the pen name of the Japanese author Edogawa Rampo is, by God, a homonym for Edgar Allan Poe as his name might be said on the Ginza! I don't mind admitting that came to me as a complete and total surprise.

So if you'd like to find a book which tells you what the likes of such formidable types as Stephen King, Peter Straub, or Ramsey Campbell take to be the best piece of Horror writing they ever came across and are curious to learn the details of what reading the thing did to them personally, *My Favorite Horror Story* is for you.

I suggest you find it (which may not be all that easy) and grab it!

Gahan Wilson

Michael Shea combines the cosmic shudders of H. P. Lovecraft, the barbaric zest of Robert E. Howard, and the ornamental exoticism of Clark Ashton Smith in a way unique to modern fantasists. His books are smooth, painstaking blends of many seemingly disparate elements, and consequently do not appear as often as his avid fans might like. But Shea's rate of production seems, happily, to be accelerating. The opening book in his series about a dapper roughish thief, *Niffi the Lean*, appeared in 1982. The sequel, *The Mines of Behemoth*, did not show up till 1997. (Both

BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

Wit'ch War, by James Clemens, Del Rey Trade Paperback, \$15.00. Book Three of "The Banned and the Banished" is classic Fantasy rich with magic and a cast of characters you will never forget. The young wit'ch Elena must recover the potent Blood Diary and defeat the evil "Magicks" of the Dark Lord. With the assistance of an ocean-dwelling creature and a dragon of great renown, Elena must storm the very heart of darkness itself to recover the talisman hidden in A'loa Glen. Prophetic dreams that may or may not come to be, unexpected betrayals, brutal violence, and an incredible heroine make up the fabric of this best-

selling author's powerful adventure.

The Merchant Prince, by Armin Shimerman and Michael Scott, Pocket Books Hardcover, \$23.95. The actor best known as "Quark" on the television series *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, and Fantasy author Michael Scott have joined forces to create this novel of Fantasy and future. A true Renaissance man, Dr. John Dee—philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, alchemist, necromancer, and adviser to royalty lives

in 16th-century England, but is placed in suspended animation by an ancient and alien race determined to preserve and protect this wise man. Space and time meet their match in this diminutive (just five feet tall) and unlikely hero. Humanity is in danger, Armageddon is at hand—Will Dr. Dee,

genius from the past, prevail and indeed triumph? A fun and rollicking tale for fans of Science Fiction and Fantasy alike.

King Kelson's Bride, by Katherine Kurtz,



are currently available in an omnibus as *The Incomplete Niffit*.) Now we are gifted with the third adventure of the brave and conniving Ephesianite a mere three years later.

The *A'Rak* (Baen, mass-market, \$6.99, 314 pages, ISBN 0-671-31947-7) finds the ever optimistic Niffit adrift in the town of Big Quay in the land of Hagia. Hagia boasts a unique system of government: a theocracy sustained by a living alien spider god, A'Rak. For two centuries, A'Rak's patronage has enabled Hagia to profit commercially, but at a price. A'Rak and his myriad smaller offspring are fed on regular human sacrifices. The citizens of Hagia, satisfied with the fairness of the sacrificial system, have for generations put up with this hideous insult patiently, with only minor grumbling. But now, sensing a new threat from the nearby land of witches, A'Rak demands a tribute so large that all the old systems come tumbling down in revolution. Naturally, Niffit finds his simple plans for robbing the vaults of the theocracy swept up in the chaos.

Sharing the burden of this adventure with Niffit is a new character, a woman named Lagademe. As a nice twist to Niffit's usual male companions, Lagademe is a welcome novelty. No winsome damsel, Lagademe, in her job as bonded delivery gal, is fully equipped, mentally and physically, to meet all the gruesome challenges she will encounter, once her path crosses Niffit's. A passel of well-developed supporting characters—Lagademe's team of fellow Nuncios, the high priestess of A'Rak, a woman herder named Mav—round out the cast.

Shea can shift from silly—a magical orgy at

a dairy—to horrifying—the mass murder of a thousand citizens by the hungry A'Rak—within mere pages, making you accept each event on its own terms, part of life's contradictory pageant. His powers of description insure that every scene, even the most fantastical, will be bright and vivid. His plotting abilities guarantee a wild roller-coaster of a tale. And just when you think you have all the angles figured, he'll pull a trick like switching the narrative to A'Rak's point-of-view, engendering sympathy for the monster at the heart of the affair.

My only complaint: Niffit's more outrageously amoral aspects have been toned down in this adventure. No treachery, no cut-and-run on his friends, no bamboozling. But you can't have everything, I guess, and I'm thrilled to venture abroad once more with the master thief.

Here's an interesting readerly experiment you might like to perform. Take an ongoing fantasy series some three decades old, which has produced over thirty books, none of which you have ever read before, and then dive straight into the newest one. Any enjoyment you derive from the current novel will be testament to the author's sheer storytelling powers, unaided by nostalgia. As a corollary, any flaws will emerge more clearly without the filter of rose-colored memory.

The book I performed this devious critical trick on is Christopher Stasheff's *A Wizard in the Way* (Tor, hardcover, \$22.95, 224 pages, ISBN 0-312-86648-8), the latest in Stasheff's patented mix of fantasy and SF that began with 1969's *The Warlock in Spite of Himself*. I can report that my tactic worked, highlight-

Ace Hardcover, \$22.95.

Author Kurtz lives in a renovated castle in Ireland and has been writing Fantasy for well over 25 years. This novel of "The Deryni" is a long-awaited conclusion to Kurtz's epic history of her imaginary kingdom. This is the series that ended seven years ago with the question of the king's marriage. It is imperative that King Kelson produce an heir. Although wed to his beloved kingdom, Gwynedd, the king knows he must choose a bride and choose one posthaste. Will his choice be one of necessity and calculation? Or

will the king choose from the heart? A rich and romantic tale sure to please lovers of Fantasy, romance, intrigue, and the Middle Ages.

The *Clandestine Circle*, by Mary H. Herbert, *Wizards of the Coast* Paperback, \$6.99. A "Dragonlance" tale. Rose Knight Linsha Majere earns a place on the elite bodyguard of Hogan Blight. He is the mysterious lord governor of the city of Sanction. The city itself is under constant threat of turmoil. An active volcano, a plague-laden ship, the Legion of Steele, and subversive knights. But what of the turmoil in Linsha's own heart?

Lady of Horses, by Judith Tarr, *A Forge* Hardcover, \$25.95. The advent of the goddess of earth. Tarr's newest prehistoric Fantasy is a prequel to her *White Mare's Daughter*. Nomadic tribes, pre-Celts, savage and superstitious peoples, Shamans, and cannibalism make up the fabric of this marvelous and passionate book. Sparrow, daughter of a Shaman and servant to the Horse Goddess, must begin a perilous journey to discover her own power and ride the White Mare. Called a "love song to the ancient, mysterious bond between women and horses." Culture clashes, accurate historical detail, and a decided feminist slant make this an original and important epic Fantasy. ♫



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Australian Aboriginal art and American television share a mystic bond.

1 HOLLYWOOD DREAMING

It's a truism by now that the contemporary counterparts of the gods and goddesses of Olympus are the stars of Hollywood: Marilyn Monroe as Venus, Paul Newman as Apollo. In fact, by calling them "stars," we even lend a deeper and cosmological sensibility, paralleling the likes of Arnold Schwarzenegger to Orion the Hunter, or Jennifer Love Hewitt to the Princess Cassiopeia; constellations are visible from this world, but they are also symbols of unreachable ideals that offer some form of guidance, as in astrology and navigation.

That the gods and goddesses affected the course of human history, and that demigods (half god and half human, like Hercules) enjoyed special status and special powers—these can all be paralleled, quite easily, in Hollywood terms to figures like Angelina Jolie (daughter of John Voight) and Emilio Estevez and Charlie Sheen (sons of Martin Sheen). Political figures court public favor by associating with the stars, and sometimes the stars even come down to espouse political causes (Charlton Hes-

ton advocating for the NRA, Barbra Streisand fundraising for Clinton). Hollywood stars are as much a fixture in the contemporary mythic consciousness as the gods and goddesses were in ancient times.

We can take a dispassionate look back at former religious traditions, particularly "dead" ones like the Olympians, and, without much alarm, understand their comparison to a form of entertainment. But what if we stay closer to home, turn the analogy around and examine entertainment as a form of religion?

If you doubt this comparison, consider for a moment that stars make their living because the public pays lots of money to "worship" them on the big and little screens. This worship involves the audience members temporarily giving up their real worlds to immerse themselves in the fictional narratives that play out on screen. We call this kind of engagement the "willful suspension of disbelief." Likewise, the public that participates in a major organized religious tradition (be it Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or Buddhism) pays a lot of money—though it is construed as donations—to worship in churches or temples, where they imagine mythic narratives, making those myths real through the power of belief.

On the pulpit and behind the scenes in the administration of the churches and temples, we find the counterparts of directors, producers, and other Hollywood executives. A few centuries ago, when the wealthy merchants of Europe were buying indulgences from the Pope, which were the guarantee of divine forgiveness for earthly money, this odd hypocrisy was understood by the general public—sort of like the groundlings envying those who got balconies and preferred seats.

During the depression era, American theaters began to take on cathedral-like qualities and became, for the common person, places in which to escape the grim reality of food lines and impoverishment. In the lushly appointed Art Nouveau and Art Deco buildings, people could leave behind their mundane reality to enjoy various fantasy lands which, as Hollywood's income grew, became more and more lavish themselves. In the imaginary worlds on screen were played out epic narratives of every genre—amplifications and idealizations that made the real world pale by comparison. (The irony is that the studios were making great amounts of money off the poor. To paraphrase the famous quote of Karl Marx

A Wandjina figure floating on a cave wall in the Kimberley area of Australia. This Aboriginal art drawing is over 8,000 years old.



more accurately, it is entertainment, and not religion, that is "the opiate of the masses.")

Things have changed quite dramatically in the world of movie going with the introduction of television, then video, then cable, then the internet—all technologies that bring the imaginary world (and the so-called "real" world of media journalism) into the mundane world of the home; but even so, the typical American in the past half century is likely to have spent more hours in a theater than in a church. We spend more time looking at the flickering lights on the silver and phosphorous screens than at what goes on behind the candles on an altar.

What does this mean?

Since folklore overlaps so much with myth and since myth is the underlying structure of religion, and since both folklore and myth happen to be the convergence of the real and the imagined (one could say fact and fantasy), the ramifications of what I've discussed above are quite profound. Indeed, the topic is one that most people would rather not address because to think about it unconsciously would be to challenge their unexamined notions about the meaning of religion and moral virtue.

With the introduction of the media blitz on particular "real" topics like the Gulf War, the O.J. Simpson case, and the explicit fabrication of reality—its actual construction right under our noses in pseudo-real programs like MTV's *Real World*—the blurring of boundaries has become commonplace. When a film like *The Truman Show* appears to introduce the theme to us, it is actually behind the times, when thousands of people are already allowing their lives to be scrutinized around the clock by their webcams.

Reality is created by consensus, and that consensus is in the process of changing quite rapidly and radically; it is created in the interactive space, that nebulous interstice, between the "real" and the imagined.

2. THE DREAMTIME

There are another people, barely hanging on these days, for whom this interpenetration of the real and the imagined has an entirely different value. They are the Australian Aborigines, whose culture, it is generally agreed, is the oldest continuous tradition on the planet. By some estimates, the Aborigines—and not the Africans—are the actual ancestors of modern humans, since their mitochondrial DNA has the highest degree of mutation among human populations (you might recall that the "African Eve" was traced through mitochondrial DNA, which is carried exclusively through the maternal lineage).

Among the Australian Aborigines, who, at one time, were considered the most primitive people on the planet, there is the tradition of the Dreamtime. For most Americans, the common understanding of the Dreamtime, drawn from a few films and the literature of the New Age, is of a sort of par-

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"Red Maple," by Isabelle Myong-wol and Folkroots author Heinz Fendl is painted in the Dreamtime style of the Aborigines.

allel world which the Aborigines can enter in a trancelike state. By accessing the Dreamtime, the Aborigine can gain special information about hunting, weather, and future events. The Dreamtime also offers a rich and sophisticated spirituality that compensates for the Aborigines' (by our standards) otherwise impoverished and primitive lives. Narratives like *Mutant Message from Down Under* (a sort of Celestine Prophecy from the Antipodes, which was originally sold as a memoir but then reclassified as fiction when it went mainstream), mythify the Aborigines and their Dreamtime tradition, posing them as the potential saviors of the world or as the last holdouts to a worldwide corruption caused by destructive ideology of Western Civilization.

The Dreamtime is hard to explain in logical terms because it defies the logic of most human language. (In fact, when Aborigines talk of the Dreaming, they use a specific verb form reserved for that purpose.) The Dreamtime is what preexisted human history, and yet it is the state to which things will return in the end; at the same time, it is a state of reality parallel to our own, and which actually weaves together with our reality at particular intersections. Aborigines can access the Dreamtime by performing particular rituals, but they can also drift into it during any time of day. The Dreaming is the most profoundly sacred thing, and yet it is also entirely matter-of-fact. (You will notice here that I am having to use the structure of binary opposition to describe the Dreamtime, but that grammatical/logical structure is hardly up to the task. I might as well be talking about the Tao.)

Let me list some of the general features of the Dreamtime: The past, the present, and the future are all continuously present there.

It is the storehouse of cultural knowledge. It is accessible from a state of consciousness different from our typical state. It is a medium through which practical information as well as myth can be communicated great distances. In it, things can be simultaneously one thing and another. Access to it is enhanced by ritual objects (like crystals) and the use of ritual ornamentation (red ochre). It can be accessed from anywhere, although there are sites especially conducive.

The Dreamtime Law, which provides specific and stringent rules by which the Aborigines must live, is largely responsible for their lack of interest in "developing" or "advancing" by western terms; it is also the reason that they have been the single most difficult people for Christian missionaries to convert (one mission in central Australia had fewer than ten converts in half a century). When each individual has direct access to the divine and the mystical, it is not necessary (nor attractive) to take on a religious tradition in which the divine is experienced through an intermediary, like a priest, who happens to be part of an administrative power structure, like the church, which exists by raising money from the faithful.

It is true that the Aborigines are uniquely privileged with a Dreamtime to which only they have access. But there is another, more powerful, Dreamtime that is destroying that of the Aborigines, and it does, in fact, come from the West—more specifically, its origins are in America as a mutation of film. It is television.

3. AMERICAN DREAMING

The Aborigines, as I have mentioned, have been considered the most primitive people still living on the earth. Up in this hemisphere, we Americans are (arguably, and by



our standards) the most advanced people on the earth. And we have our own Dreamtime, which we access every day. Children average over 3.5 hours of this access each day, in front of what's been called the "boob tube" and the "glass teat" (a reference not only to the breastlike shape of the TV tube, but to its ironic form of nurture and its use as a convenient childcare tool).

The word "television" means, literally, "distant vision," referring to the ability to see things that are far away. Initially this term was coined to refer to geographical distance, but over the years it has also come to mean things that are distant in time. On any given viewing day across the globe, much of the entire brief history of television is being transmitted. The cliché used to be that at any given moment in the day, somewhere in the world, a rerun of *The Lucy Show* was on. (You might note the ironic parallel of this cliché with "The sun never sets on the British Empire.")

The parallels between the Dreamtime and television are uncanny when one considers them as general features: The past, the present, and the future are continuously transmitted on television—the past in reruns (though, technically, even first run shows are a representation of the past), the present in live telecasts of news events and sports, and the future through myriad Science Fiction and Fantasy shows (these might be construed as a sort of mythic vision, but much of the televised future works like a template to which reality catches up). Television is a vast storehouse of knowledge, particularly now that there are specialty channels like the Discovery Channel, A & E, and the History Channel; mythic knowledge gets transmitted also by AMC, HBO, and Showtime in the form of major films. All of these shows are transmitted great distances, continuously representing the entire range of human knowledge (from archaeological speculation to futurist projection). On television, the forms of things are utterly malleable. Not only can actors play a range of characters, they can become the voices and personalities of otherwise inanimate objects; animation and CGI effects can metamorphose anything into anything. Television can be accessed from (nearly) anywhere, and access is enhanced through various reception devices which rely on crystals (semiconductors) and antennae (metals). People engage with television viewing as a kind of ritual process (kicking back after a hard day at work, or turning the lights down to produce a theatrical effect for serious viewing), or they may access television casually throughout the day. (When is the last time you did not see a TV screen throughout an entire day, even if you weren't watching?)

In the same way that the Aborigines use a particular verb form for discussing the Dreaming, we tend to lapse into present tense when talking about TV shows that have engaged us in the past. And television

is certainly a state of reality that parallels and intersects with our own because we often find ourselves in it or on it; we also have access to its mythic figures in their more mundane form.

I could go on with the general parallels here, but I think I've established enough for you to draw your own. What I want to do is to get at the deeper parallel between television and the Dreaming, one that explains why one form preserves the world and the other is one of the causes of its destruction.

4. THE BODY ELECTRIC

It has been a well-established fact, from scientific sources, that ancient holy sites are almost always located in places with high levels of geomagnetic activity. In the old cultures, these locations are said to follow ley lines (in Celtic lore) or in places with concentrated chi (in Chinese lore). Recently, close links have also been made between geomagnetic activity and UFO sightings as well as alien abductions.

Magnetic fields have a powerful effect on the temporal lobe of the human brain, which is the area linked to out of body experiences, near death experiences, alien abduction, and certain states of spirituality. (Michael Persinger, a Canadian psychologist, has been able to create out of body and abduction experiences in subjects by directly stimulating their temporal lobes with electromagnetic fields.)

There is a strong suggestion that psychic activity among humans oscillates in direct correspondence to lulls in sunspot activity, which is when the earth's magnetosphere is least active. This means that sunspot activity interferes not only with communications technology (radio and television), it also directly inhibits the electrochemistry of the human brain as well. Humans, like most animals, are able to sense the Earth's magnetic field. In animals, we can see this most apparently in their ability to navigate (homing pigeons are a prime example), but in humans we usually talk about this geomagnetic sense as a sense of direction or a certain form of kinesthetic intuition. Even when people are underground with no astronomical cues to give them an indication of direction, most can still intuit north unless their directional sense has been scrambled by the proximity of a magnetic field. In one famous experiment, blindfolded subjects who had magnets taped to the backs of their heads could not orient themselves, though others could.

We also talk about psychic abilities in terms of "vibes" and "reception," using the vocabulary of radio. It just happens that the human pineal gland, located in the brain and said by Dessartes to be the seat of the soul, contains an unexpected substance called "brain sand," which is made of tiny quartz crystals. How it ends up in the brain remains a mystery, but oddly enough, crystals are used in radio receivers (some of you may recall the crystal radios you made as science

projects in elementary school). Crystals have piezoelectrical properties, which means that when they are compressed, they produce an electrical current, and when they are affected by electrical current, they vibrate at highly regular intervals (which is why they are used in quartz watches).

Aborigines seem to have a highly developed perception regarding geomagnetism, and it is thought among some tribes that the internal organs of powerful shamans have all transformed into quartz crystal. In Aboriginal languages and culture, one finds distinctions between potential and actualization that seem, at first, to be too abstract for such a "primitive" people. It would take a volume to make this argument at any depth, but the blunt fact is that Aborigines have somehow maintained the direct ability to perceive geomagnetism and other electromagnetic phenomena. That is why their languages often seem to be more in keeping with that of quantum physicists than with the stone age. And that is why much of the fantastically abstract and colorful artwork by the Aborigines, which seems on the surface to be abstract and unexpectedly modern, is actually representational. The compositions of colored dots and lines are actually accurate pictures in the same way that a "realistic" painting of a bowl of fruit would be representational in the west.

Perhaps it's just coincidence that the images on a television screen are also arrangements of bright, colored dots brought to us through an electromagnetic medium. Those images are transmitted via radio waves and projected onto the picture tube after the waves are converted into electrical pulses. We happen to be surrounded, continuously, by electromagnetic radiation of all kinds (including an alarming and increasing array of overlapping signals from sources ranging from AM radio to cell phone transmissions). If we could hear all of this radio wave activity, it would go beyond the category of noise pollution. Even without sunspot activity, there is plenty of electromagnetic noise on the earth to inhibit what may be a natural human psychic potential. But when we watch television, we willfully participate in affecting our psyches by forming a special relationship with the radio signal.

The illusion responsible for the picture on the tube is caused by the brain's interpolation of alternating scan lines—the picture is created in the brain and not on the tube. And oddly enough, watching the flickering colors on the tube, while having the brain create the illusion of the moving picture, is relaxing, much like sitting and watching a campfire at night. The act of watching television puts us in a state of consciousness close to the alpha state, in which we are highly susceptible to both information and suggestion, making us prime targets for advertising and propaganda. (Although television tubes with higher resolution and without the subtle

Power comes in a number of forms.
Sometimes it appears when no one expected it.

THE TRICKSTER'S WIFE

It was Thursday, as near as Sigyn could tell. She had no calendar, but usually a rumble, brooding sort of atmosphere filled the air of the cave on a Thursday. She had come to be pretty good at seeing the differences in days, down in the cave where her husband, albeit greatly against his will, resided.

Hel came to visit on Thursday. Sigyn looked forward to those visits though, frankly, she wasn't all that fond of Loki's bastard daughter. No one was, really, but it broke up the day. After so many days, Sigyn had come to appreciate that.

Hel peeked around a bend in the tunnel. "Hello, Sigyn."

Hel looked tired. Being tired would probably

make her irritable, not that any of Loki's offspring had ever needed much excuse for that.

"Hello, Hel. Come to visit your father?"

Hel walked out into the chamber. Sigyn no longer winced at the girl's black-and-blue complexion; one got used to that. Otherwise she was a tall, skinny thing, with just enough of the height of her giantess mother to make her too tall for the slimness she got from her father's side of the family.

Slightly built Loki had never been a particularly strong god, even in his prime. Thor could have snapped him like a twig. Sometimes Sigyn wondered why he hadn't. The Vanir and Aesir alike knew Loki had given the thunder god enough provocation. Sigyn didn't wonder long; she knew the reason—fate. Wyrd, destiny,

By Richard Parks
Illustration by Mahendra Singh



all the words for the Way Things Had to Be. It wasn't Thor's destiny to kill Loki; Thor had other eels to fry. As did Loki, for that matter. Or so the Norns had said.

"Father looks better today," Hel said.
"No, he doesn't."
Drip.

Hel glanced up at the serpent on its tree, a tree that had no business being where it was, and yet was, because it needed to be, to hold the serpent that dripped venom onto Loki's bound form. Or would have, if not for Sigyn's intervention with her bowl. Sigyn glanced down at her husband. Loki's eyes were open. His limbs were bound by iron chains formed from the entrails of his butchered son. Her son too, Sigyn remembered, though it was hard. She tried to remember his face. Failed.

"I can't even remember his name," she said aloud.

Hel looked confused. "Loki."

Sigyn shook her head. "Someone else. A long time ago."

Hel sat down on a stone fairly close but far enough away to avoid a splash, should there be one. "Has he spoken?"

"No, child."

Sigyn rather doubted that Loki could speak anymore. One look into her father's wild eyes should have told Hel that much. There had been little to Loki to begin with except mischief and well-concealed rage. Now the mischief was gone and rage was all that remained, and not well concealed at all.

"I'm no child," Hel said. "I am Queen of the Underworld and Lady of the Dead!"

Because no one else wants to be, Sigyn thought. Well, the Aesir had regretted that detail soon enough when Woden's dear son Balder came under Hel's control.

"You're his child," Sigyn said aloud, with as much diplomacy as she could muster. She didn't want to anger Hel unnecessarily; she would miss their visits if she pushed the girl too far. Not that she'd meant insult; Sigyn just couldn't help thinking of Hel as a child, despite her immortality. What the years didn't touch the years didn't teach. As for herself, well, she had other lesson masters to lean on.

"Not yours," Hel said pointedly.

"For which I'm a bit sorry," Sigyn admitted. "I would have loved to have a daughter." Or any child still living, she thought but didn't say. Even a monster like you.

Somewhat mollified, Hel leaned back on the stone a bit. "They're talking about you, you know," she said.

Sigyn steadied the bowl which was heavy and in danger of tipping. "Who is 'they,' if I might ask?"

Hel shrugged. "Everyone."

"What are they saying?"

"No one talks to me," Hel said, sullen. "I listen, though. Always. I hear your name but little else. The Aesir, the Vanir. They sound angry."

Sigyn nodded, then turned her face up, pretending to study the serpent so Hel wouldn't

see her smile. "I think they might be."

"Why?"

"For being a good wife to your father."

Hel frowned. "I don't understand."

"I do. I think I have from the beginning," Sigyn said.

Hel didn't say anything or ask what Sigyn meant. Mysteries didn't interest her, or much of anything below the surface of a matter. Sigyn considered that one of Hel's few virtues.

Sigyn's bowl was almost full, and, as she had thousands of times before, she got up to empty it. And, like a thousand times before, Loki twisted in rage and agony in his fetters as the poison, unimpeded, dripped onto his breast. The earth shook.

His strength grows along with his madness. I'll have to be more careful.

Sigyn hurried, but not as much as she could have.

It wasn't Thursday and hadn't been for some time. This day had a different feel to it. Wodensday. Someone was coming to visit, too. Thor didn't come on Thursday. Who might come on a Wodensday? Sigyn didn't know. Yet so used to her surroundings she was that even a slight change, anywhere, that affected that sameness stood out like a blazing beacon. Something was different today. Someone would visit her. She knew it.

It was Woden. He appeared suddenly, as he was wont to do wherever he went, his floppy traveler's hat pulled low over his face.

And on his own day. How oddly appropriate, Sigyn thought, and nothing else. She wasn't even surprised, really. She just waited patiently with her filling bowl.

"Sigyn," he said. There was a reflection on his face, a reddish cast as if he were illuminated by torches. Only there were no torches there, just the unchanging weight of that deep place. Little else seemed god like about him. By appearances he might have been an itinerant tradesman.

"All-Father. Welcome. Forgive me for not rising."

Woden glanced at Loki's bound form. "Still suffering, I see."

"As you wished."

Woden shook his head. The phantom light was lost in the blackness where his right eye used to be. "I did not want this. I wanted my son back." There was an unspeakable weariness on his face. Sigyn hadn't seen him for a very long time but seemed to remember that he looked tired then, too.

"I speak to Hel of that now and again," Sigyn said. "She just looks at me, and asks after her father. I don't think she quite understands the connection."

"I think she does, more or less," Woden said.

"Then why doesn't she just let Balder go?"

"Because she made a bargain. We did not fulfill the terms."

"Because of Loki."

Woden looked back at the tightly bound trickster god. "Yes. All because of him. The death, then the loss. All of it."

"So you killed my sons to punish the father and the circle is completed, and here we are again. I had two of them, did I not? Sons? I seem to recall you turned one of them into a wolf to rend the other."

Woden frowned. "That does not matter. It was done."

Sigyn sighed. "Fate, again? It's how we answer everything."

Woden looked at her. "You could release the poison, Sigyn."

"What sort of wife would I be then? How would I serve fate betraying my nature?"

"You refuse?" He didn't sound angry, or disappointed. He just sounded tired.

"How can I do other than what I must do as you did? Aren't we all bound to the rock, All-Father? In our own way?"

Woden didn't answer. In another moment he was gone. Sigyn turned to empty the bowl, and again, for a time, the earth shook.

Sigyn watched the bowl, wondering who the visitor would be today. It wasn't Wodensday or Thursday or Freysday. Not that the day dictated, but Sigyn still liked to look for connections. There was little else to do but hold the bowl and think. She had done this for a long time. Memory faded, but thought did not. It remembered the purpose, if very little of the reason, for all that Sigyn had done since that black day so long ago. It was enough.

Three visitors that day. Three hooded crones with faces mostly hidden by crows blacker than night.

"Greetings, Loki's wife," they said as if there were only one voice among them.

"The sister Norns, greetings. This is an unexpected honor."

"No it isn't," they said. They seemed perturbed. Almost...frantic, for all that they moved and spoke very slowly.

Sigyn was not perturbed or frantic, and moved even slower than they did. She had reason to be consistent and constant but seldom had reason to hurry. "Which? Honor or unexpected?"

"You knew we would come. We knew that you would know."

Sigyn nodded. "If you say so, for isn't it true that you know everything?"

"We know...what we must know."

Sigyn couldn't suppress a smile. "Fate rules the Fates? This is a strange world."

They ignored that. "We are tired, Sigyn."

Sigyn nodded. "As am I. So very tired. People come to visit me here in my loneliness, but they never offer to hold the bowl, even for a moment. I'd take it back, of course. No one but me is bound to hold it. Do they offer? No, they do not. Not even Hel, Loki's own dear daughter."

"You are angry," they said.

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VERY SPECIAL AGENTS



If no one has built a house in that lovely clearing in the woods, perhaps there's a good reason.

THE DARBIES



"Just moved in?" the hardware-store clerk asked as Mary Ellen brought her selection of garden tools and seeds to the counter.

"I'm staying at the Klein place," said Mary Ellen. Knowing small towns, he probably knows anyway.

"Oh," as he checked the price on the spade. "The old Darby place, where the professor had the stroke."

"They only built it a couple of years ago," said Mary Ellen. "And their name is Klein." So much for small-town gossip.

Through the door she could see Suzanne leaning against the car. She'd already managed to attract a circle, all male of course, none of them looking like anything she'd invite home to meet mother. Where did she get those sultry good looks? Face it, you didn't marry Roc for his brains ...

BY KATE RIEDEL
ILLUSTRATION BY J.K. POTTER

Suzanne peeled herself away from the car and swung herself onto the passenger seat, long legs last, waving to the half-dozen young men dispersing to their waiting motorcycles.

"Don't say it, Mom," she said, turning her face away from Mary Ellen. "We'll have to divide the computer time between my work and your schoolwork," Mary Ellen said with careful calm as she turned the key in the ignition. "Do you want mornings or afternoons?"

"Mornings or afternoons?" Suzanne mimicked. "You think I haven't figured out that psychology crap? As if I had a choice."

They maintained silence then, past the sign that marked the town limits. A few miles farther Mary Ellen turned off first to a tared road, then a dirt road, then another, each turn-off narrowing, the trees hanging closer until the branches almost brushed the car.

"Mrs. Klein thought that some of this might be original woods," said Mary Ellen. Suzanne didn't reply.

They emerged from the last road, little more than a trail, into the clearing enclosing the neat little house that had been intended for the Kleins' retirement years.

"The Kleins were lucky there was no vandalism," said Mary Ellen.

"Is that supposed to mean something?"

"No." Mary Ellen's foot came down harder than necessary on the brake.

"I don't have to stay here, you know."

"And if you run away, then what?" The anger came through this time. The policeman's words still ate at her bowels. "If you can't control her, maybe she'll have to be taken away from you..."

"You're ashamed of me, aren't you?" said Suzanne.

"Oh, Susie..."

"Don't call me Susie. And you are ashamed of me, just like you were of Dad."

Mary Ellen sighed. "Help me carry in the groceries, please?"

Suzanne didn't move.

Mary Ellen hoisted one of the bags of groceries from the back seat.

Sheer luck there hadn't been any break-ins over the winter, she thought as she entered the kitchen. Everything left behind in the hurried departure after Dr. Klein's stroke; furniture, linen, dishes in the cupboards, full bottles in the liquor cabinet.

"It's a nice day; let's go exploring," she called, returning to the front porch. No response. She sighed and stepped off the porch onto the spring-damp ground and walked slowly around the house, hoping Suzanne would change her mind and follow.

A tangle of wild raspberry canes, enamel-green leaves just budding on red-brown stems, marked the boundary between clearing and wood. Beyond, new growth gave way to old hardwoods. Humus of centuries, spongy underfoot, exuded the heady scent of acid earth and rotting wood. Trilliums blooming here in less than a month; crowsfoot and bloodroot, and maybe hepatica. Magic woods, like the ones behind Grandpa's barn, where Grandma had told her she could see fairies if she got up early enough...

The Sun went under a cloud; the air turned suddenly chill.

"If you can't control her..." Would he have said that to her if she had been a man? Would he have said that to Roc?

A blast of what Suzanne called music signaled that she had finally left the car for the house.

Fairies, forsooth. Long since time to give up that syrupy nonsense.

Suzanne had shut herself in her room, but the last two grocery bags lay neatly folded on the table, their contents put away in cupboards and refrigerator.

"Thank you," Mary Ellen called through the closed door, although she doubted Suzanne could hear her over the CD player. The music almost drowned out the ringing phone.

"Everything's fine," Mary Ellen assured Mrs. Klein. "Except I think some raccoons may have moved in under the roof this winter; there was a dreadful racket in the middle of the night... No, nothing disturbed that I could see. When I call the man about digging the garden, I'll ask him take a look."

"Oh yes, do go to Mr. Costello for any odd jobs that need doing."

"How did you know his name?"

"He was the only person from town who'd work for us. A shame, when we were more than willing to hire local help. There seems to be some family named Darby that controls the construction business around there, as far as I can tell. It sounded like a protection racket to me, but what can you do if no one complains? It was Mr. Costello found Robert, you know, after he had the stroke. And even he tried to blame it on these Darbys."

"Do you think..."

"Oh, of course there was no question of anything but a stroke."

"How is Dr. Klein?"

"It's hard to tell. I told him you were going to care-take the place, but I'm not sure he understood. It's such a burden off me to have you looking after it."

"I should be thanking you."

"Nonsense my dear, I'm glad we could both help each other."

"I just hope I'm doing the right thing."

"Of course you are. Teenagers are so vulnerable, especially someone as bright as Suzanne. Don't worry, she'll turn out OK; she's a good kid."

Mr. Costello brought the stepladder and disappeared into the space between the ceiling and roof. Mary Ellen heard him clambering over the rafters. Then his wiry legs in their dark-blue overalls reappeared on the ladder, the rest of him following with the healthy caution of old age.

"Have an onion?" he asked.

Mary Ellen produced an onion; Mr. Costello cut it in quarters with his pocket knife and climbed the ladder again.

"A piece in each corner; that should keep them out," he said as he descended and folded the ladder. "Your daughter?" he asked, catching a glimpse of Suzanne turning on the computer in the next room.

"Yes. We're distance-schooling to make up time she was sick this winter," she added, before Mr. Costello could ask.

"We're distance-schooling to make up time she was sick." Suzanne turned on Mary Ellen in furious mimicry the minute he was out the door.

"So what did you want me to say? Suzanne was kicked out of school for willful destruction of property and association with known troublemakers?"

"Say what you like."

Mary Ellen turned abruptly back to the kitchen and got out flour, shortening, and yeast. Take it out on bread, not on the kid. Bread set to rise under a towel, she came back to the front room, and was pleased to see Suzanne was actually doing schoolwork.

"Nothing else to do around here," Suzanne said, as if reading her mind.

"There's lots of things to do, if you give it a chance."

In reply, Suzanne reached over and switched on the CD player, putting a wall of music between them.



Mr. Costello shut off the rototiller when he saw Mary Ellen. "Frost is out of the ground," he said. "You can plant in another week. But then you know that, you're a country girl, I can tell."

Mary Ellen laughed. "Not really, although I spent a couple of years on my grandfather's farm. It gave my mom a chance to get back on her feet after she left my dad."

"Drink? Not that it's any of my business."

"No point in hiding it. Anyway, Mom, she did me a favor by giving me that time in the country. I just wish I could have done the same for Suzanne."

Her and Roc. Her mother's mistake repeated, but she'd had no loving grandparents to take in Suzanne; only a succession of day-cares and babysitters while she'd struggled from job to job. Roc's parents had offered to help, but she had her pride. And what if they tried to take Suzanne away from her? They'd made it without help, she and Suzanne, until Roc ...

"It's a tough age she's at, and her being pretty as she is only makes it harder," Mr. Costello said.

"I'm hoping this will be the same sort of experience for her," Mary Ellen said. "Woods to explore, berries to pick, maybe even some fairies at the bottom of the garden."

"Now don't you go talking about those people," said Mr. Costello.

"The other kind," she laughed, and added, to cover her embarrassment, "I've bread raising, and it should be baked by the time you're done here. Would you like a loaf to take home?"

The distress faded from his round face. "Well, you are a smart gal after all. Thank you very much. And," he added before turning back to the tiller, "don't you forget to take some with you yourself when you go out into the woods. And make sure that little girl of yours does too."

"Oh, we'll always be home in time for supper," she said. But he'd already started the motor.



She didn't hear any raccoons that night, but she did wake in a sweat from a nightmare about a wild party, drunken laughter, and music circling the house. She rose and went quietly to the kitchen, gray and foreign under the full Moon that rode above the windows.

The only thing circling the house was curls of mist silvered by moonlight, the only music that of the spring peepers.

Warm sun slanted over the clearing when she woke in the morning, puddled in bright patches on the kitchen floor. She took her coffee to the back porch to watch the shadows shorten as the Sun rose higher. The woods were already greener.

She remembered going with Grandpa to bring the cows in for morning milking, her running shoes soaked with dew, watching for the fairies Grandma had told her she could see if she only looked ... Mary Ellen smiled, set down her coffee cup, and crossed the dew-wet lawn to the woods.

Here was a white trillium already in bloom. And a red one, and in the lee of a fallen log, a jack-in-the-pulpit. In an open patch of young poplars, three morels poked through last year's leaves and brown grass. She picked them almost reverently. Another one, just a little way off ... and another one ...

She didn't know just when she started stepping across the hummocks of the swamp. Or when she realized she didn't remember this swamp from her previous brief excursion into the woods.

Or that the shadows weren't shortening, they were lengthening. Suzanne must have every light in the house on ...

Mary Ellen stunnished out of the dark and into the kitchen as the clock struck midnight. "How could you do this to me?" Suzanne yelled. "How could you do this to me?"

"I'm sorry." But Suzanne pulled away from the arm Mary Ellen attempted to put around her.

"Look at you! Just look at you!" The same words Mary Ellen had yelled at Suzanne after nights of waiting up, promises to be home at 11 long broken.

She looked down at her mud-stained clothes. The morels had been lost long since.

"I got lost in the woods," she said.

"You what?" And then, "Oh, Mom, I was so scared! I got up and you were gone and you didn't come back. And then it got dark and there was someone outside the house and they wouldn't go away and I was so scared."

Suzanne collapsed in tears against Mary Ellen's dirty sweatshirt.

"I have to go to work, honey, but Daddy will be coming ..." But Roc had never come. Suzanne clinging to her. "I was so scared, Mom ... I'm so sorry, sweetheart, I'll never do it again ..."

"I'm so sorry, sweetheart ..."

"Oh, Mom, I was afraid they'd got you!"

She didn't noticed the puncture in her leg until she undressed to shower. She pressed it until it bled clean, and applied antiseptic.

Afraid they'd got you ... who?

The sore was scabbed over by morning.

An old maple came down in a thunderstorm, and Mr. Costello cut it up for firewood.

"Get someone to help you," Mary Ellen told him. "I'd be happy to pay the extra cost."

He shook his head. "They don't want to cross the Darbys."

"If everyone else is so afraid of these Darbys, why aren't you?"

"They can't hurt me anymore than they already have." He started the chain saw.

Suzanne finished her schoolwork and went out to help him without being asked. This just may work, Mary Ellen thought, watching her daughter help stack the split wood, laughing at some story Mr. Costello told her, sobering at another, pausing to give the old man a hug before picking up another chunk of wood to carry to the stack at the side of the house.

"Mr. Costello says he had a daughter just like me," Suzanne said at supper that night.

"Had?"

"She left. He says I ought to be in school with other kids my own age."

"Did she run away? Did he go to the police?"

Suzanne gave her an 'Oh, Mom' look, and turned her attention to her plate.



Mary Ellen worked in the garden mornings and listened to the conversations and quarrels of the crows. She'd missed the trilliums, had picked no fiddleheads or wild leeks. There would be violets blooming in the woods now, and she wouldn't see them ...

A shadow fell over her.

"Finished my schoolwork early," said Suzanne. "Want to go for a walk?"

Mary Ellen shook her head. "I've got work to do this afternoon."

"No you don't. You're scared."

"No, really, I ..."

"You're chicken. Ever since you got lost, you're chicken. There's violets. And wood anemones."

"How do you know what wood anemones look like?"

"You showed me. Remember when we used to go for walks in the conservation area when I was little, and you'd tell me the names of things?"

"And you never listened."

"That's what you thought."

"But I really ..."

"Buk-buk-buk-buk-buk!" Suzanne crowed. "Come on, Mom." She pulled something from her pocket. A slice of bread. "Mr. Costello told me that if you carry bread with you, they can't get you."

"Who can't get you?" asked Mary Ellen, standing and dusting off her hands.

"The Darbys."

"I've really got to meet these Darbys one of these days."

"Mr. Costello says not to have anything to do with those people," said Suzanne, with the solemnity of a small child.

They rested side by side on a log, warmed by the late-afternoon sunshine slanting through the trees. Maybe we can be happy after all ...

"Mom?"

"What?"

"Why did Dad kill himself?"

To get even with me for trying to get on with my life when he couldn't. But Mary Ellen didn't say that aloud.

"If I'd ..." Suzanne went on. "The days he turned up to take me places, I didn't want to go. And most of the days he didn't turn up. Just like that day he was supposed to babysit."

"I'll never forgive myself for that."

"You had to go to work."

"Not that badly. If I'd known ..."

"I can't help thinking that if I'd just, I don't know ..."

"It is not your fault," said Mary Ellen. "Don't ever think that."

"I'm not really like him, am I?"

You're as beautiful as he was. But aloud Mary Ellen said, "You're like yourself."

"Mom ..." Suzanne looked down at her fingers. "I heard what that policeman told you. What a creep."

"You're a good kid. I can trust you ..."

"Mom ..."

"What?"

"Where'd you get that thing on your leg?"

Mary Ellen looked down at the puncture wound that still hadn't healed.



The local motorcycle gang gathered as usual around Suzanne. Did any of this bunch belong to the infamous Darby family? Mary Ellen asked as she collected her mail at the post office.

"Them? Oh, no," the clerk replied, looking mildly astonished. He turned abruptly to the next customer. Mary Ellen came out the door in time to see Suzanne straddling one of the motorcycles behind its disreputable-looking driver, disappearing around the corner and out of sight.

"Don't worry, Mom," Suzanne laughed at her 15 minutes later. "I just wanted the ride. He's not really my type. If you must know, he's actually kinda dim."

Maybe she does need to be around kids her own age. "I'm so proud of you, Susie," Mary Ellen said as she tore open and read Suzanne's school reports.

"Don't call me Susie," Suzanne said automatically, smiling as she read the report for herself.



The music, raised voices, drunken laughter circling the house continued even after she woke.

Mary Ellen pulled herself out of bed and looked out the window, but the sounds had moved to the opposite side of the house. She stepped quietly out of her room and peered into Suzanne's. The blankets were a dark mound on the bed; blankets, in spite of the warm midsummer night! Poor kid, probably scared to death, Mary

Ellen thought, trying to ignore her own trembling.

The laughter rose, louder, closer. On the back porch? She moved quietly down the hall to the kitchen.

Then squeezed her eyes shut against the sudden glare of the kitchen lights flaring on; hearing, through the sunbursts behind her eyelids, footsteps clattering down the hall. She opened her eyes. Half-a-dozen scraggly teenage kids trooped into the kitchen, pulled bottles from the liquor cabinet as if they knew exactly where it was.

Suzanne followed them, opened the cupboard, and began to hand down a highball glass.

"What the hell is going on?" said Mary Ellen.

Suzanne turned and threw the glass in her hand. It shattered against the wall next to Mary Ellen. The back door blew open and the kitchen was empty except for Mary Ellen and Suzanne. Her eyes locked on Suzanne, Mary Ellen waited for the roar of motorcycles.

The breeze that blew through the back door into the kitchen brought only the cry of a night hawk.

Mary Ellen bent to pick up the pieces of the glass.

Suzanne brushed past her in silence. Her bedroom door slammed.

Next morning Mary Ellen checked for footprints and tire tracks as far as the end of driveway and found none but her own.

"I had this really weird nightmare last night," said Suzanne at the breakfast table.

Mary Ellen silently lifted the lid of the wastebasket and indicated the broken highball glass.

"You think I'm lying to you, don't you?"

You said you weren't lying the other times. But you were. "One of us was sleepwalking?"

"Do you think so?" said Suzanne with relief. "That must have been it."

"Most of the things in this house aren't ours," said Mary Ellen.

"I'll replace the glass," said Suzanne. "You can take it out of my allowance."

"It was a dream," Suzanne said halfway through breakfast. "I had to be sleepwalking. Somebody knocked on the front door, and they kept knocking. So I opened the door. And then ..."

"You thought you'd offer them a drink."

"Go ahead, be sarcastic. It was a dream, after all. It seemed like the right thing to do. It was kind of like the house was over a path, like that restaurant we ate at once, remember? That was built right over the highway, so you could look down on the cars going underneath. Only they can't go underneath this house, so they have to go through."

"It appears to have been a particularly vivid dream."

"You don't believe me."

"I know what I saw."

Suzanne pushed back her chair and ran from the kitchen.

Mary Ellen reached down to scratch at the sore on her leg. The skin around it was red and swollen. She pressed; pus burst out. She squeezed it as clean as she could, wiped it, wincing, with hydrogen peroxide, and bandaged it. It no longer itched or hurt.

But it didn't seem to be healing either.

A freak windstorm blew one of the Kleins' deck chairs against the kitchen window, shattering the glass. Mary Ellen called Mr. Costello, and although she told him there was no hurry, the weather being fine, he insisted on her giving him the measurements over the phone and came out to replace the glass the same day. Suzanne helped him; Mary Ellen could hear their voices in a pleasant background hum as she pursued her own work at the computer.

"You'll be moving out this fall, won't you?" Mr. Costello said to Mary Ellen. "So the little girl can go back to school."

"Maybe," said Mary Ellen.

Suzanne helped bake bread.
"Next time I'll be able to do it myself," she said.
"And make your own protection against the Darbys," Mary Ellen joked. Suzanne didn't laugh.



Summer turned to warm and golden fall. Suzanne said she wanted to continue distance-schooling.

"Are you sure?"

"That's what you want, isn't it, Mom?"

"You do seem to be doing so well."

"You're limping, Mom," said Suzanne as they carried in the last tomatoes after killing frost was forecast.

"It's that damn thing on my leg again."

She made herself a bread poultice, the way, as best she could remember, her grandmother had done. The swelling subsided, but next day it was worse than ever. By noon she had decided to go to the hospital's emergency ward.

"I can finish getting in the vegetables," said Suzanne.

"You aren't afraid to stay alone?"

"I'll be OK, Mom, don't worry."

"I'll be home before dark."

But when she got to the hospital she found that a highway accident took precedence.

She'd lived long enough with this infection, she could stand it a little while longer. Nonetheless, she was distressed, after exhausting the waiting room's stock of last year's Good Housekeeping and TIME, to realize it was after five o'clock. She was about to go look for a phone to call Suzanne when a nurse informed her that the doctor was here.

"Nasty," he said on seeing the infected spot. "But we can take care of it right here." Mary Ellen flinched as the local anesthetic went in. "There. That'll just take a minute or two. So you're living out at the Klein place?" Mary Ellen nodded. "Met the Darbys?"

"What?" said Mary Ellen, but the doctor had disappeared through the curtain of the cubicle to answer a nurse's query, and her leg was numb by the time he returned. She turned her head as he made the incision, and gasped at the foul smell.

"You've been drinking untreated water."

"Not that I know of," she said between clenched teeth. "Why?"

"Ever heard of a water wolf? You get the eggs into your stomach they'll hatch and finally break out on the surface. This looks like ... hold still, we have to get this cleaned out. Heck," he went on, reaching for a swab, "there's still some people around this part of the country who'd look at this mess and say you'd got a fairy blast."

"What?"

"Hold still. That piece of land the Kleins bought is supposed to be thick with them. Of course no one ever refers to them as fairies, not even among themselves, and not to outsiders like you and me. Only reason I know is my wife was born and raised just outside of town. Good folk, Darbys, whatever. Hold on, there's something else in here ..."

He reached for the forceps. "When I first moved here people would still move a house they thought had been built over Darby paths. Even today, some won't let their kids out without bread in their pockets. In fact my mother-in-law still insists Dr. Klein never had a stroke, he 'got took' by the ... There we are ..."

He held up the forceps. What had felt as big as a nail barely extended beyond the tips of the forceps. The shard from Mrs. Klein's highball glass glittered as he dropped it onto a piece of gauze on the tray.

"All nonsense, of course," as he reached for cotton swab and disinfectant. "People would rather blame things on the fairies than admit to Down's syndrome in the family, or Alzheimer's. Easier to say your kid was stolen by the fairies than that you left him alone and he wandered off and fell down a well. Hold still," he said as Mary Ellen clenched her teeth and jerked away from the vigorous swabbing.

"There we go." He put down the swab and reached for the roll of gauze. "Sad, really. Of course, the new superstitions are just as bad as the old ones," he said, cutting off a length of gauze. "My kid's in trouble, officer? Not my fault. How can I be home with him when I have to work to make ends meet?"

He folded the gauze into a neat square. "Bet you a nickel that's what some woman's telling the police right now about those kids we patched up from that road accident. I didn't know he took the car, officer, I had to work."

He cut a piece of tape and placed it across the square of gauze. "Just as silly nonsense as the fairies. If people would just work a little harder at their marriages, it would make all the difference in the world. Look at us; my wife never worked."

"Well," he finished as he taped up the bandage, "I'll send the nurse back with some antibiotics, and a couple of painkillers in case you need them. Don't let the fairies get you!" he chuckled as he disappeared through the curtain.

All the lights in the house were on and both front and back door open, spilling rectangles of light onto the dark lawn, along with drunken voices and laughter.

"Will you be scared? Scared! I probably wasn't gone five minutes before she was phoning up her friends from town! How could I have been so stupid ... The doctor's words countered the policeman's. I didn't know, I had to work ... If you can't control her, maybe she should be taken away from you ... I had to work ..."

The laughter and voices stopped as if it turned off by a switch.

The liquor cabinet had been plundered, its door dangling by a hinge. Kitchen chairs were flung helter-skelter. Spilled food and liquid stained floor and counter, and broken dishes lay scattered as if they had been used as missiles.

Suzanne backed against the counter like a cornered squirrel.

"Look at this place! Just look at it."

Suzanne's mouth moved, but Mary Ellen wouldn't let her speak.

"Don't tell me you couldn't help it. There are locks on the door. There's a telephone to call for help. But that's not what you used the phone for, was it?"

"They had to come through," Suzanne said, her voice faint, as if a stranger's speaking from far away.

"How stupid do you think I am?"

"I don't ..."

"Or maybe I am stupid. You've lied to me again and again, and I've given you another chance again and again. And you take advantage of it ..."

"Mom!"

"Just like your father!"

Behind her someone laughed. Mary Ellen whirled around.

There was no one there.

When she turned back, a piece of bread, still retaining the prints of clenched fingers, lay on the floor where Suzanne had stood.

"Suzanne!" she called.

Laughter swirled around the house, back to front.

Mary Ellen ran down the hall to the front door. Across the lawn the interior light of the car glowed like a jack-o-lantern.

She can't take the car. She'll have an accident, they'll take her away from me ...

Mist swirled around her like embodiment of the laughter as she dashed across to the car. It was empty, the light glowing behind the door she'd left unlatched in her dash for the house.

Too late anyway. Probably miles from here on the back of a motorcycle ...

The night fell silent. There were no motorcycles.

The yard was as empty as when she had driven in.

No revving motors. Only laughter, fading into the distant woods.

"Susie! Susie, I'm sorry! Susie, I love you ..."

The laughter faded into silence. ♦

THE MAN WHO STOLE THE MOON

(A Story of the Flat Earth)

As so often, from an idea by John Kailne.

Several tales are told concerning the Moon of the Flat Earth. Some say that this Moon, perhaps, was a hollow globe, within which lay lands and seas, having even their own cool Sun. However, there are other stories.

One evening, Jaqir the accomplished thief rose from a bed of love and said to his mistress, "Alas, sweetheart, we must now part forever." Jaqir's mistress looked at him in surprise and shook out her bright hair. "You are mistaken. My husband, the old merchant, is miles off again, buying silk and other stuff, and besides suspects nothing. And I am well satisfied with you."

"Dear heart," said Jaqir, as he dressed his handsome self swiftly, "neither of these things is the stumbling block to our romance. It is only this, I have grown tired of you."

"Tired of me?" cried the lady, springing from the bed.

"Yes, though indeed you are toothsome in all respects, I am inconstant and easily bored. You must forgive me."

"Forgive you!" screamed the lady, picking up a handy vase.

Jaqir ducked the vase and swung nimbly out of the high window, an action to which he was quite accustomed, from his trade. "Although a deceiver in my work, honesty in my private life is always my preferred method."

**Stealing the Moon is as easy as
stealing a lover's heart. Giving
it back is a bit more difficult.**

BY TANITH LEE

ILLUSTRATION BY CAROL HEYER



he added, as he dropped quickly down through the vine to the street below. Once there he was gone in a flash, and just in time to miss the jar of piddle the lady that moment upended from the window. However, three of the king's guard, next second passing beneath, were not so fortunate.

"A curse upon all bladders," howled they, wringing out their cloaks and hair. Then looking up, they beheld the now no-longer mistress of Jaqir, and asked her loudly what she meant by it.

"Pardon me, splendid sirs," said she. "The befoulment was not intended for you, but for that devilish thief, Jaqir, who even now runs through that alley there toward a hiding place he keeps in the House of the Thin Door."

At the mention of Jaqir, who was both celebrated and notorious in that city, the soldiers forgot their inconvenience, and gave instant chase. Never before had any been able to lay hands on Jaqir, who, it was said, could steal the egg from beneath a sleeping pigeon. Now, thanks to the entanglement of his discarded lover, the guard knew not only of Jaqir's proximity, but his destination. Presently then they came up with him by the House of the Thin Door.

"Is it he?"

"So it is, for I have heard, when not in disguise, he dresses like a lord, like this one, and, like this one, his hair is black as a panther's fur."

At this they strode up to Jaqir and surrounded him.

"Good evening, my friends," said Jaqir. "You are fine fellows, despite your smell."

"That smell is not our own, but the product of a night-jar emptied on us. And the one who did this also told us where to find the thief Jaqir."

"Fate has been kind to you. I will not therefore detain you further."

"No, it is you who shall be detained."

"P" asked Jaqir modestly.

But within the hour he discovered himself in chains in the king's dungeons.

"Ah, Jaqir," said he to himself, "a life of crime has taught you nothing. For have the gods not always rewarded your dishonesty—and now you are chastised for being truthful."

Although of course the indifferent, useless gods had nothing to do with any of it.

A month or so later, the king got to hear that Jaqir the Prince of Thieves languished in the prison, awaiting trial.

"I will see to it," said the king. "Bring him before me."

So Jaqir was brought before the king. But, despite being in jail, heing also what he was, Jaqir had somehow stolen a gold piece from one jailor and gifted it to another, and so arrived in the king's sight certain in chains, but additionally bathed, barbered, and anointed, dressed in finery, and with a cup of wine in his hand.

Seeing this, the king laughed. He was a young king and not without a sense of the humorous. In addition, he knew that Jaqir, while he had stolen from everyone he might, had never harmed a hair of their heads, while his skills of disguise and escape were much admired by any he had not annoyed.

"Now then, Prince of Thieves, may a mere king invite you to sit? Shall I strike off your chains?" added the king.

"Your majesty," said one of the king's advisers, "pray do not unchain him, or he will be away over the roofs. Look, he has already stolen two of my gold rings—and see, many others have lost items."

This was a fact. All up and down the palace hall, those who had gathered to see Jaqir on trial were exclaiming over pieces of jewelry suddenly missing. And one lady had even lost her little dog, which abruptly, and with a smile, Jaqir let out of an inner compartment in his shirt, though it seemed quite sorry to leave him.

"Then I shall not unchain you," said the king. "Restore at once all you have filched."

Jaqir rose, shook himself somewhat, and an abundance of gold

and gems cascaded from his person.

"Regrettably, lord king, I could not resist the chance to display my skills."

"Rather you should deny your skills. For you have been employed in my city seven years, and lived like the prince you call yourself. But the punishment for such things is death."

Jaqir's face fell, then he shrugged. He said, "I see you are a greater thief, sir, than I. For I only presume to rob men of their goods. You are bold enough to burgle me of my life."

At that the court made a noise, but the king grew silent and thoughtful. Eventually he said, "I note you will debate the matter. But I do not believe you can excuse your acts."

"There you are wrong. If I were a beggar calling for charity on the street you would not think me guilty of anything but ill luck or indigence. Or, if I were a seller of figs you would not even notice me as I took the coins of men in exchange for my wares."

"Come," said the king. "You neither beg nor sell. You thief."

"A beggar," said Jaqir, "takes men's money and other alms, and gives nothing in return but a blessing. Please helieve me, I heap blessings on the heads of all I rob, and thank them in my prayers for their charity. Had I begged it, I might, it is true, not have received so great a portion. How much nobler and blessed are they then, that they have given over to me the more generous amount? Nor do they give up their coins for nothing. For what they buy of me, when it is I who steal from them, is a dramatic tale to tell. And indeed, lord king, have you never heard any boast of how they were robbed by me?"

The king frowned, for now and then he had heard this very thing, some rich noble or other reciting the story of how he had been despoiled of this or that treasure by the nimble Jaqir, the only thief able to take it. And once or twice, there were women, too, who said, "When I woke, I found my rings were gone, but on my pillow lay a crimson rose. Oh, would he had stayed a while to steal some other prize."

"I am not," declared Jaqir, "a common thief. I purloin from none who cannot afford the loss. I deduct nothing that has genuine sentimental or talismanic weight. I harm none. Besides, I am an artist in what I do. I come and go like a shadow, and vanish like the dawn into the day. You will have been told, I can abstract the egg of a pigeon from beneath the sleeping bird and never wake it."

The king frowned deeply. He said, "Yet with all this vaunted knack, you did not, till today, leave my dungeons."

Jaqir bowed. "That was because, lord king, I did not wish to miss my chance of meeting you."

"Truly? I think rather it was the bolts and bars and keys, the numerous guards—who granted you wine, but not an open door. You seem a touch pale."

"Who can tell?" idly answered pale Jaqir.

But the king only said, "I will go apart and think about all this." And so he did, but the court lingered, looking at Jaqir, and some of the ladies and young men came and spoke to him, but trying always not to get near enough to be robbed. Yet even so, now and then, he would courteously hand them back an emerald or amethyst he had removed from their persons.

Meanwhile the king walked up and down a private chamber where, on pedestals of marble, jewel-colored parrots sat watching him.

"He is clever," said the king, "handsome, well mannered, and decorative. One likes him at once, despite his nefarious career. Why cast such a man out of the state of life? We have callous villains and nonentities enough. Must every shining star be snuffed?"

Then a scarlet parrot spoke to him.

"O king, if you do not have Jaqir executed, they will say you are partial, and not worthy to be trusted with the office of judge."

"Yes," said the king, "this I know."

At this another parrot, whose feathers shone like a pale-blue sky, also spoke out. "But if you kill him, O king, men may rather say you were jealous of him. And no king must envy any man."

"This is also apt," said the king, pacing about.

Then a parrot spoke, which was greener than jade.

"O king, is Jaqir not a thief? Does he not brag of it? Set him then a test of thieving, and make this test as impossible as may be. And say to him, 'If you can do this, then indeed your skill is that of a poet, an artist, a warrior, a prince. But if you fail you must die.'"

Then the king laughed again. "Well said. But what test?"

At that a small gray parrot flew from its pedestal, and standing on his shoulder, spoke in the king's ear with a jet-black beak.

The king said, "O wisest of all my counselors."

In the palace hall Jaqir sat among the grouped courtiers, being pleasant and easy with them in his chains, like a king. But then the king entered and spoke as follows:

"Now, Jaqir, you may have heard, in my private rooms four angels live, that have taken another form. With these four I have discussed your case. And here is the verdict. I shall set you now a task that, should you succeed at it, must make you a hero and a legend among men—which happy state you will live to enjoy, since also I will pardon all your previous crimes. Such shall be your fame then, that hardly need you try to take anything by stealth. A million doors shall be thrown wide for you, and men will load you with riches, so astonishing will your name have become."

Jaqir had donned a look of flattering attention.

"The task then. You claim yourself a paragon among thieves. You must steal that which is itself a paragon. And as you say you have never taken anything which may be really missed, on this occasion I say you will have to steal something all mankind shall miss and mourn."

The court stood waiting on the king's words. Jaqir stood waiting, perforce. And all about, as at such times it must, (still must), the world stood waiting, hushing the tongues of sea and wind, the whispers of forests and sands, the thunder of a million voiceless things.

"Jaqir, Prince of Thieves, for your life, fly up and steal the Moon from the sky. The task being what it is, I give you a year to do it."

Nine magicians bound Jaqir. He felt the chains they put on him as he had scarcely felt the other chains of iron, thinking optimistically as he had been, that he would soon be out of them.

But the new chains emerged from a haze of iridescent smokes and a rumble of incantations, and had forms like whips and lions, thorns and bears. Meeting his flesh, they disappeared, but he felt them sink in, painless knives, and fasten on his bones and brain and mind.

"You may go where you wish and do what you will and suffer nothing. But if you should attempt, in any way, to abscond, then you will feel the talons and the fangs of that which has bound you, wrapped gnawing inside your body. And should you persist in your evasion, these restraints shall accordingly devour you from within. Run where you choose, seek what help you may, you will die in horrible agony, and soon. Only when you return to the king, your task accomplished fully, and clearly proven, will these stricture lapse—but that at once. Success, success alone, spells your freedom."

So then Jaqir was let go, and it was true enough, honesty being the keynote to his tale so far, that he had no trouble, and could travel about as he wanted. Nor did any idea enter his mind concerning escape. Of all he was or was not, Jaqir was seldom a fool. And he had, in the matter of his arrest, surely spent sufficient foolishness to last a lifetime.

Since he was *not* a fool, Jaqir, from the moment the king had put the bargain to him, had been puzzling how he might do what was demanded.

In the past, many difficult enterprises had come Jaqir's way, and he had solved the problem of each. But it is to be remembered, on none of these had his very existence depended. Nor had it been so strange: One thing must be said, too, the world being no longer as then it was—Jaqir did not at any point contest the notion on the grounds that it was either absurd or unconscionable. Plainly sorcery existed, was everywhere about, and seldom doubted. Plainly the Moon, every night gaudily on show, might be accessible, even to men, for there were legends of such goings on. Thus Jaqir never said to himself, What madness have I been saddled with? Only: How can I effect this extraordinary deed?

So he went up and down in the city, and later through the landscape beyond, walking mostly, to aid his concentration. Sometimes he would spend the night at an inn, or in some rich house he had never professionally bothered but which had heard of him. And occasionally men did know of him to recognize him, and some knew what had been laid upon him. And unfortunately, the nicest of them would tend to a similar, irritating act. Which was, as the Moon habitually rose in the east, to mock or rant at him. "Aiee, Jaqir. Have you not stolen her yet?"

Because the Earth was then flat, the Moon journeyed over and around it, dipping, after moonset, into the restorative seas of chaos that lay beneath the basement of the world. Nor was the Moon of the Flat Earth so very big in circumference (Although the size of the Moon varied, influenced by who told—or tells—the tales).

"What is the Moon?" pondered Jaqir at a wayside tavern, sipping sherbet.

"Of what is the Moon *made*?" murmured Jaqir, courting sleep, for novelty, in an olive grove.

"Is it heavy or light? What makes it, or she, glow so vividly? Is it a she? How," muttered Jaqir, striding at evening between fields of silver barley, "am I to get hold of the damnable thing?"

Just then the Moon willfully and unkindly rose again, unstolen, over the fields. Jaqir presently lay down on his back among the barley stalks, gazing up at her as she lifted herself higher and higher. Until at length she reached the apex of heaven, where she seemed for a while to stand still, like one white lily on a stem of stars.

"Oh Moon of my despair," said Jaqir softly, "I fear I shall not master this riddle. I would do better to spend my last year of life—of which I find only nine months remain!—in pleasure, and forget the hopeless task."

At that moment Jaqir heard the stalks rustling a short way off, and sitting up, he saw through the darkness how two figures wandered between the barley. They were a young man and a girl, and from their conduct, lovers in search of a secret bed. With a rueful nod at the ironies of Fate, Jaqir got up and meant to go quietly away. But just then he heard the maiden say, "Not here, the barley is trampled—we must lie where the stalks are thicker, or we may be heard."

"Heard?" asked the youth. "There is no one about."

"Not up in the fields," replied the girl, "but down *below* the fields the demons may be listening in the Underearth."

"Ho," said the youth (another fool), "I do not believe in demons."

"Hush! They exist and are powerful. They love the world by night, as they must avoid the daylight, and like moonlit nights especially, for they are enamored of the Moon, and have made ships and horses with wings in order to reach it. And they say, besides, the nasty magician, Paztak, who lives only a mile along the road from this very place, is nightly visited by the demon Drin, who serve him in return for disgusting rewards."

By now the lovers were a distance off, and only Jaqir's sharp ears

GOOD EVENING.

MY FRIENDS, SAID

JAQIR. YOU ARE FINE

FELLOWS, DESPITE

YOUR SMELL.

had picked up the ends of their talk after which there was silence, save for the sound of moonlight dripping on the barley. But Jaqir went back to the road. His face had become quite purposeful, and perhaps even the Moon, since she watched everything so intently, saw that too.

Now Paztak the magician did indeed live nearby, in his high, brazen tower, shielded by a thicket of tall and not ordinary laurels. Hearing a noise of breakage among these, Paztak undid a window and peered down at Jaqir, who stood below with drawn knife.

"What are you at, unruly felon?" snapped Paztak.

"Defending myself, wise sir, as your bushes bite."

"Then leave them alone. My name is Paztak the Unsociable. Be off, or I shall conjure worse things—to attack you."

"Merciful mage, my life is in the balance. I seek your help, and must loiter till you give it."

The mage clapped his hands, and three yellow, slaver-ing dogs leaped from thin air and also tried to tear Jaqir into bite-size pieces. But avoiding them, Jaqir sprang at the tower and, since he was clever at such athletics, began climbing up it.

"Wretch!" howled Paztak. And then Jaqir found a creature, part wolverine and part snake, had roped the tower and was striving to wind him as well in its coils. But Jaqir slid free, kicked shut its clashing jaws, and vaulted over its head onto Paztak's windowsill.

"Consider me desperate rather than impolite."

"I consider you *elsewhere*," remarked Paztak with a new and ominous calm.

Next instant Jaqir found himself in a whirlwind, which turned him over and over, and cast him down at last in the depths of a forest.

"So much for the mage," said Jaqir, wiping snake-wolverine, dog, and laurel saliva from his boots. "And so much for me, I have had, in my life, an unfair quantity of good luck, and evidently it is all used up."

"Now, now," said a voice from the darkness, "let me get a proper look at you, and see if it is."

And from the shadows shouldered out a dwarf of such incredible hideousness that he might be seen to possess a kind of beauty.

Staring in awe at him then, from his appearance, and the fabulous jewelry with which he was adorned, Jaqir knew him for a Drin.

"Now, now," repeated the Drin, whose coal-black, luxuriant hair swept the forest floor. And he struck a light by the simple means of running his talonous nails—which were painted indigo—along the trunk of a tree. Holding up his now flaming hand, the Drin inspected Jaqir, gave a leer and smacked his lips. "Handsome fellow," said the Drin. "What will you offer me if I assist you?"

Jaqir knew a little of the Drin, the lowest caste of demonkind, who were metalsmiths and artisans of impossible and supernatural ability. He knew, too, as the girl had said, that the Drin required, in exchange for any service to mortals, recompense frequently of a censorable nature. Nor did this Drin seem an exception to the rule.

"Estimable sir," said Jaqir, "did you suppose I needed assistance?"

"I have no doubt of it," said the Drin. "Sometimes I visit the old pest Paztak, and was just now idling in his garden, in chat with a most fascinating woodlouse, when I heard your entreaties, and soon beheld you hurled into this wood. Thinking you more interesting than the mage, I followed. And here I am. What would you have?"

"What would you have?" asked Jaqir uneasily.

"Nothing you are not equipped to give."

"Well," said Jaqir resignedly, "we will leave that for the moment. Let me first see if you are as cunning as the stories say." And Jaqir thought, pragmatically. After all, what is a little foul and horrible dreadfulness, if it will save me death?

Then he told the Drin of the king's edict, and how he, Jaqir the thief, must thieve the Moon.

When he had done speaking, the Drin fell to the ground and rolled amid the fern, laughing, and honking like a goose, in the most repellent manner.

"You cannot do it," assumed Jaqir.

The Drin arose, and shook out his collar and join-guard of rubies.

"Know me. I am Yulba, pride of my race, revered even among our demonic high castes of Eshva and Vazdra. Yulba, that the matchless lord, Azhran the Beautiful, has petted seven hundred times during his walkings up and down in the Underearth."

"You are to be envied," said Jaqir prudently. He had heard, too, as who had not who had ever heard tales about the demons, of the Prince of Demons, Azhran. "But that does not mean you are able to assist me."

"Pish," said the Drin. "It is a fact, no mortal thing, not even the birds of the air, might fly so high as the Moon, let alone any *man* essay it. But I am Yulba. What cannot Yulba do?"

Three nights Jaqir waited in the forest for Yulba to return. On the third night Yulba appeared out of the trunk of a cedar tree, and after him he hauled a loose, glimmering, almost-silky bundle, that clanked and clacked as it came.

"Thus," said the Drin, and threw it down.

"What is that?"

"Have you no eyes? A carpet I have created, with the help of some elegant spinners of the eight-legged sort, but reinforced with metals fashioned by myself. Everything as delicate as the wings of bees, strong as the scales of dragons. Imbued by me with spells and vapors of the Underearth, as it is," bragged on the Drin, "the carpet is sorcerous, and will naturally fly. Even as far as the gardens of the stars, from where, though a puny mortal, you may then inspect your quarry, the Moon."

Jaqir, himself an arch-boaster, regarded Yulba narrowly. But then, Jaqir thought, a booster might also boast truthfully, as he had himself. So as Yulba undid the carpet and spread it out, Jaqir walked on there. The next second Yulba also bounded aboard. At which the carpet, with no effort, rose straight up between the trees of the forest and into the sky of night.

"Now what do you say?" prompted the Drin.

All the demon race were susceptible to flattery. Jaqir spoke many winning sentences of praise, all the while being careful to keep the breadth of the carpet between them.

Up and up the carpet flew. It was indeed very lovely, all woven of blue metals and red metals, and threaded by silk, and here and there set with countless tiny diamonds that spangled like the stars themselves.

But Jaqir was mostly absorbed by the view of the Earth he now had. Far below, itself like a carpet, unrolled the dark forest and then the silvery fields, cut by a river-like black mirror. And as they flew higher yet, Jaqir came to see the distant city of the king, like a flower garden of pale lights, and farther again, lay mountains, and the edges of another country. "How small," mused Jaqir, "has been my life. It occurs to me the gods could never understand men's joy or tribulation, for from the height of their dwelling, how tiny we are to them, less than ants."

"Ants have their own recommendations," answered Yulba.

JAQIR. PRINCE OF THIEVES. FOR YOUR LIFE. FLY UP AND STEAL THE MOON FROM THE SKY.

But the Moon was already standing high in the eastern heaven, still round in appearance, and sheerest white as only white could be.

No command needed be given the carpet. Obviously Yulha had already primed it to its destination. It now veered and soared, straight as an arrow, toward the Moon, and as it did so, Jaqir felt the tinsel roots of the lowest stars brush over his forehead.

And what was the Moon of the Flat Earth, that it might be approached and flown about on a magic carpet? It was, as has been said, maybe a globe containing other lands, but also it was said to be not a globe at all, but, like the Earth itself, a flat disk, yet placed sidelong in the sky, and presenting always a circular wheel of face to the world. And that this globe or disk altered its shape was due to the passage of its own internal sun, now lighting a quarter or a half or a whole of it—or, to the interference of some invisible body coming between it and some other (invisible) light, or to the fact that the Moon was simply a skittish shape-changer, making itself now round, and now a sliver like the paring of a nail.

As they drew ever nearer, Jaqir learned one thing, which in the many stories is a constant—that heat came from the Moon. But (in Jaqir's story) it was an appealing heat, quite welcome in the chilly upper sky. Above, the stars hung, some of them quite close, and they were of all types of shape and shade, all brilliant, but some blindingly so. Of the closer ones, their sparkling roots trailed as if floating in a pond, nourished on some unknown substance. While below, the world seemed only an enormous smudge.

The Drin himself, black eyes glassy, was plainly enraptured by the Moon. Jaqir was caught between wonder and speculation.

Soon enough, the vast luminescence enveloped them, and the heat of the Moon was now like that of a summer morning. Jaqir estimated that the disk might be only the size of a large city, so in his story, that is the size of the Moon.

But Jaqir, as the carpet began obediently to circle round the lunar orb, gazed at it with a proper burglar's care. Soon he could make out details of the surface, which was like nothing so much as an impeccable plate of white porcelain, yet here and there cratered, perhaps by the infrequent fall of a star. And these craters had a dim blue ghostly sheen, like that of a blue beryl.

When the carpet swooped yet nearer in, Jaqir next saw that the plate of the moon had actually a sort of landscape, for there were kinds of smooth, low, blanching hills, and here and there something which might be a carved water-course, though without any water in it. And there were also strewn boulders, and other stones, which must be prodigious in girth, but they were all like the rarest pearls.

Jaqir was seized by a desire to touch the surface of the hot, white Moon.

He voiced this.

Yulha scowled, disturbed in his rapturous trance.

"Oh ignorant man, even my inspired carpet may go no closer, or the magnetic pull of the Moon will tug, and we crash down there."

As he spoke, they passed slowly around the globe, and began moving across the back of the Moon, which, until that minute, few mortals had ever seen.

This side lay in a deep velvet shadow, turned from the Earth, and tilted upward somewhat at the vault of the sky. It was cooler here, and Jaqir fancied he could hear a strange sound, like harps playing softly, but nothing was to be seen. His hands itched to have something away.

"Peerless Yulha, in order to make a plan of assault, I shall need to get, for reference, some keepsake of the Moon."

"You ask too much," grumbled Yulha.

"Can you not do it? But you are Yulha," snarled Jaqir, "lord among Drin, favorite of the Prince of Demons. What is there Yulha cannot do? And, I thought we were to be friends..."

Yulha cast a look at Jaqir, then the Drin frowned at the Moon with such appalling ugliness, Jaqir turned his head.

"I have a certain immense power over stones," said the Drin, "see-

ing my kind work with them. If I can call you a stone from the Moon, what is it worth?"

Jaqir, who was not above the art of lying either, lied imaginatively at some length, until Yulha lumbered across the carpet and seemed about to demonstrate affection. "Not however," declared Jaqir, "any of this, until my task is completed. Do you expect me to be able to concentrate on such events, when my life still hangs by a thread?"

Yulha withdrew once more to the carpet's border. He began a horrible whistling, which set on edge not only Jaqir's teeth but every bone in his body. Nevertheless, in a while, a single pebble, only about the size of an apricot, came flying up and struck Yulha in the eye.

"See—I am blinded!" screeched Yulha, thrashing on the carpet, but he was not. Nor would he then give up the pebble. But soon enough, as their transport—which by now was apparently tiring—sank away from the Moon, Jaqir rolled a moment against the Drin, as if losing his balance. Thereafter the moon-pebble was in Jaqir's pocket.

What a time they had been on their travels. Even as the carpet flopped, wearily and bumpily now, toward the Earth, a blossoming of rose pink appeared in the east.

This pretty sight, of course, greatly upset Yulha, for demons feared the Sun, and with good reason, it could burn them to ashes.

"Down, down, make haste accused flea-bag of a carpet!" ranted he, and so they rapidly fell, and next landed with a splashy thump in a swamp, from which green monkeys and red parakeets erupted at their arrival.

"I shall return at dusk. Remember what I have risked for you!" growled Yulha.

"It is graven on my brain."

Then the Drin vanished into the ground, taking with him the carpet. The Sun rose, and the amazing Moon, now once more far away, faded and set like a dying lamp.

By midday Jaqir had forced a path from the swamp. He sat beneath a mango tree and ate some of the ripe fruit, and stared at the moon-pebble. It shone, even in the daylight, like a milky flame. "You are more wonderful than anything I have ever thought. But still I do not see how I can rob the sky of that other jewel, the Moon."

Then he considered, for one rash moment, running away. And the safeguarding bonds of the king's magicians twanged around his skeleton. Jaqir desisted, and lay back to sleep.

In sleep, a troop of tormenters paraded.

The cast-off mistress who had betrayed him slapped his face with a wet fish. Yulha strutted, seeming hopeful. Next came men who cried, "Of what worth is this stupid Jaqir, who has claimed he can steal an egg from beneath a sleeping bird."

Affronted in his slumber, Jaqir truthfully replied that he had done that very thing. But the mockers were gone.

In the dream then Jaqir sat up, and looked once more at the shining pebble lying in his hand.

"Although I might steal a million eggs from beneath a million birds, what use to try for this? I am doomed and shall give in."

Just then something fluttered from the mango tree, which was also there in the dream. It was a small gray parrot. Flying down, it settled directly upon the opalescent stone in Jaqir's palm and put out its light.

"Well, my fine bird, this is no egg for you to hatch."

The parrot spoke. "Think, Jaqir, what you see, and what you say."

Jaqir thought. "Is it possible?"

And at that he woke a second time.

The Sun was high above, and over and over across it and the sky, birds flew about, distinct as black writing on the blue.

"No bird of the air can fly so high as the Moon," said Jaqir. He added, "but the Drin have a mythic knack with magical artifacts and clockworks."

Later, the Sun lowered itself and went down. Yulha came bounding from the ground, coyly clad in extra rubies, with a garland of lotuses in his hair.

"Now, now," commenced Yulha, lurching forward.

Sternly spoke Jaqir, "I am not yet at liberty, as you are aware. However, I have a scheme. And knowing your unassailable wisdom and authority, only you, the mighty Yulba, best and first among Drin, can manage it."

In Underearth it was an exquisite dusk. It was always dusk there, or a form of dusk. As clear as day in the upper world, it was said, yet more radiantly somber. Sunless, naturally, for the reasons given above.

Druhim Vanashta, the peerless city of demonkind, stretched in a noose of shimmering nonsolar brilliance, out of which pierced, like needles, chiseled towers of burnished steel and polished corundum, domes of faceted crystal. While about the gem-paved streets and sable parks strolled or paced or strode or lingered, the demons. Night-black of hair and eye, snow-frozen-white of complexion, the high-caste Vazdru and their mystic servants, the Eshva. All of whom were so painfully beautiful, it amounted to an insult.

Presently, along an avenue, there passed Azhram, Prince of Demons, riding a black horse, whose mane and tail was hyacinth blue. And if the beauty of the Eshva and Vazdru amounted to an insult, that of Azhram was like the stroke of death.

He seemed himself idle enough, Azhram. He seemed too musing on something as he slowly rode, oblivious, it appeared, to those who bowed to the pavement at his approach, whose eyes had spilled, at sight of him, looks of adoration. They were all in love with Azhram.

A voice spoke from nowhere at all.

"Azhram, Lord Wickedness, you gave up the world, but the world does not give up you. Oh Azhram, Master of Night, what are the Drin doing by their turgid lake, hammering and hammering?"

Azhram had reined in the demon horse. He glanced leisurely about.

Minutes elapsed. He too spoke, and his vocality was like the rest of him. "The Drin do hammer at things. That is how the Drin pass most of eternity."

"Yet how," said the voice, "do you pass eternity, Lord Wickedness?"

"Who speaks to me?" softly said Azhram.

The voice replied, "Perhaps merely yourself, the part of you that you discard, the part of you which years after the world."

"Oh," said Azhram. "The world."

The voice did not pronounce another syllable, but along an adjacent wall a slight mark appeared, rather like a scorch.

Azhram rode on. The avenue ended at a park, where willows of liquid amber let down their watery resinous hair, to a mercury pool. Black peacocks with seeing eyes of turquoise and emerald in their tails, turned their heads and all their feathers to gaze at him.

From between the trees came three Eshva, who obeyed themselves.

"What," said Azhram, "are the Drin making by their lake?"

The Eshva sighed voluptuously. The sighs said (for the Eshva never used ordinary speech), "The Drin are making metal birds."

"Why?" said Azhram.

The Eshva grew downcast; they did not know. Melancholy enfolded them the tall black grasses of the lawn, and then one of the Vazdru princes came walking through the garden.

"Yes?" said Azhram.

"My Prince, there is a Drin who was to fashion for me a ring, which he has neglected," said the Vazdru. "He is at some labor for a human man he is partial to. They are *all* at this labor."

Azhram, interested, was, for a moment, more truly revealed. The garden waxed dangerously brighter, the mercury in the pool boiled. The amber hardened and the peacocks shut every one of their 450 eyes.

"Yes?" Azhram murmured again.

"The Drin, who is called Yulba, has lied to them all. He has told them you yourself, my matchless lord, require a million clockwork birds that can fly as high as the Earth's Moon. Because of *this*, they work ceaselessly. This Yulba is a nuisance. When he is found out, they will savage him, then bury him in some cavern, walling it up with rocks, leaving him there a million years for his million birds. And so I shall not receive my ring."

Azhram smiled. Cut by the smile, as if by the slice of a sword, leaves scattered from the trees. It was suddenly autumn in the garden. When autumn stopped, Azhram had gone away.

Chang-ibrang went the Drin hammers by the lake outside Druhim Vanashta. *Whirr* and *pling* went the uncanny mechanisms of half-formed sorcerous birds of cinnabar, bronze, and iron. Already-finished sorcerous birds hopped and flapped about the lakeshore, frightening the beetles and snakes. Mechanical birds flew over in curious formations, like demented swallows, darkening the Under-earth's gleaming day-dusk, now and then letting fall droppings of a peculiar sort.

Eshva came and went, drifting on Vazdru errands. Speechless inquiries wafted to the Drin caves: Where is the necklace of rain vowed for the Princess Vash? Where is the singing book reserved for the Prince Hazrond?

"We are busy elsewhere at Azhram's order," chirped the Drin.

They were all dwarfs, all hideous, and each one lethal, ridiculous, and a genius. Yulba strode among them, criticizing their work, so now and then there was also a fight for the flying omnipresent birds to unburden their bowels upon.

How had Yulba fooled the Drin? He was no more Azhram's favorite than any of them. All the Drin boasted as Yulba had. Perhaps it was only this: Turning his shoulder to the world of mankind, Azhram had forced the jilted world to pursue him underground. In ways both graphic and insidious, the rejected one permeated Under-earth. Are you tired of me? moaned the world to Azhram. Do you hate me? Do I bore you? See how inventive I am. See how I can still ensnare you for fast.

But Azhram did not go to the noisy lake. He did not summon Yulba. And Yulba, puffed with his own cleverness, obsessively eager to hold Jaqir to his bargain, had forgotten all accounts have a reckoning. *Chung-chung* went the hammers. *Brak* went the thick heads of the Drin, banged together by critical, unwise Yulba.

Then at last the noise ended.

The hammering and clamoring were over.

Of the few Vazdru who had come to stare at the birds, less than a few remarked that the birds had vanished.

The Drin were noted skulking about their normal toil again, constructing wondrous jewelry and toys for the upper demons. If they waited breathlessly for Azhram to compliment them on their bird-work, they did so in vain. But such omissions had happened in the past, the never-ceasing past-present-future of Underearth.

Just as they might have pictured him, Azhram stood in a high window of Druhim Vanashta, looking at his city of needles and crystals.

Perhaps it was seven mortal days after the voice had spoken to him. Perhaps three months.

He heard a sound within his mind. It was not from his city, nor was it unreal. Nor actual. Presently he sought a magical glass that would show him the neglected world.

How ferocious, the stars, how huge and cruelly glittering, like daggers. How they exalted, unrivaled now.

The young king went one by one to all the windows of his palace. Like Azhram miles below (although he did not know it), the young king looked a long while at his city. But mostly he looked up into the awful sky.

Thirty-three nights had come and gone, without the rising of the Moon.

In the king's city there had been at first shouts of bewildered amazement. Then prayers. Then, a silence fell which was as loud as screaming.

If the world had lost the Sun, the world would have perished and died. But losing the Moon, it was as if the soul of this world had been put out.

Oh those black nights, blacker than blackness, those yowling spikes of stars dancing in their vitriolic glory—which gave so little light.

What murders and rapes and worse crimes were committed under cover of such a dark? As if a similar darkness had been called up from the mental guts of mankind, like subservient to like. While earth-over, priests offered to the gods, who never noticed.

The courtiers who had applauded, amused, the judgment of the witty young king, now shrank from him. He moved alone through the excessively lamped and benighted palace, wondering if he was now notorious through all the world for his thoughtless error. And so wondering, he entered the room where, on their marble pedestals, perched his angels.

"What have you done?" said the king.

Not a feather stirred. Not an eye winked.

"By the gods—may they forgive me—what? What did you make me do?"

"You are king," said the scarlet parrot. "It is your word, not ours, which is law."

And the blue parrot said, "We are parrots, why name us angels? We have been taught to speak, that is all. What do you expect?"

And the jade parrot said, "I forget now what it was you asked of us." And put its head under its wing.

Then the king turned to the gray parrot. "What do you have to say? It was your final advice which drove me to demand the Moon be stolen—as if I thought any man might do it."

"King," said the gray parrot, "it was your sport to call four parrots, angels. Your sport to offer a man an impossible task as the alternative to certain death. You have lived as if living is a silly game. But you are mortal, and a king."

"You shame me," said the king.

"We are, of course," said the gray parrot, "truly angels, disguised. To shame men is part of our duty."

"What must I do?"

The gray parrot said, "Go down, for Jaqir, Thief of Thieves, has returned to your gate. And he is followed by his shadow."

"Are not all men so followed?" asked the king perplexedly.

The parrot did not speak again.

Let it be said, Jaqir, who now entered the palace, between the glaring, staring guards of the king, was himself in terrible awe at what he had achieved. Ever since succeeding at his task, he had not left off trembling inwardly. However, outwardly he was all smiles, and in his best attire.

"See, the wretch's garments are as fine as a lord's. His rings are gold. Even his shadow looks well dressed! And this miscreant it is who has stolen the Moon and ruined the world with blackest night."

The king stood waiting, with the court about him.

Jaqir bowed low. But that was all he did, after which he stood waiting, meeting the king's eyes with his own.

"Well," said the king. "It seems you have done what was asked of you."

"So it does seem," said Jaqir calmly.

"Was it then easy?"

"As easy," said Jaqir, "as stealing an egg."

"But," said the king. He paused, and a shudder ran over the hall a shuddering of men and women, and also of the flames in all the countless lamps.

"But!" pressed haughty Jaqir.

"It might be said by some, that the Moon—which is surely not an egg—has disappeared, and another that you may have removed it.

After all," said the king stonily, "if one assumes the Moon may be pilfered at all, how am I to be certain the robber is yourself? Maybe others are capable of it. Or, too, a natural disaster has simply overcome the orb, a coincidence most convenient for you."

"Sir," said Jaqir, "were you not the king, I would answer you in other words that I do. But king you are. And I have proof."

And then Jaqir took out from his embroidered shirt the moon-peggle, which even in the light of the lamps blazed with a perfect whiteness. And so like the Moon it was for radiance that many at once shed tears of nostalgia on seeing it. While at Jaqir's left shoulder, his night-black shadow seemed for an instant also to flicker with fire.

As for the king, now he trembled too. But like Jaqir, he did not show it.

"Then," said the king, "be pardoned of your crimes. You have surmounted the test, and are directly loosed from those psychic bonds my magicians set on you, therefore entirely physically at liberty, and besides, a legendary hero. One last thing,

"Yes?" asked Jaqir.

"Where have you put it?"

"What?" said Jaqir, rather stupidly.

"That which you stole."

"It was not a part of our bargain, to tell you this. You have seen by the proof of this stone I have got the Moon. Behold, the sky is black."

The king said quietly, "You do not mean to keep it."

"Generally I do keep what I take."

"I will give you great wealth, Jaqir, which I think anyway you do not need, for they say you are as rich as I. Also, I will give you a title to rival my own. You can have what you wish. Now swear you will return the Moon to the sky."

Jaqir lowered his eyes

"I must consider this."

"Look," they whispered, the court of the king,

"even his shadow listens to him."

Jaqir, too, felt his shadow listening at his shoulder.

He turned, and found the shadow had eyes.

Then the shadow spoke, more quietly than the king, and not one in the hall did not hear it. While every flame in every lamp spun like a coin, died, revived, and continued burning upside down.

"King, you are a fool, Jaqir, you are another fool. And who and what am I?"

Times had changed. There are always stories, but they are not always memorized. Only the king, and Jaqir the thief, had the understanding to plummet to their knees. And they cried as one, "Azhrarn!"

"Walk upon the terrace with me," said Azhrarn. "We will admire the beauty of the leaden night."

The king and Jaqir found that they got up, and went on to the terrace, and no one else stirred, not even hand or eye.

Around the terrace stood some guards like statues. At the terrace's center stood a chariot that seemed constructed of black and silver lava, and drawn by similarly laval dragons.

"Here is our conveyance," said Azhrarn, charmingly. "Get in."

In they got, the king and the thief. Azhrarn also sprang up, and took and shook the reins of the dragons, and these great ebony lizards hissed and shook out in turn their wings, which clapped against the black night and seemed to strike off bits from it. Then the chariot dove up into the air, shaking off the Earth entire, and green sparks streamed from the chariot-wheels.

Neither the king nor Jaqir had stamina—or idiocy—enough to

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BREAKING SPELLS

Maybe the old love songs are right —
maybe it is “witchcraft.”

On the mornings when Dad hadn't come home, the house stayed very quiet. He wasn't there to get up early and bang his tool boxes around getting ready for work. Momma stayed in bed and didn't fix us breakfast. When I woke to that quiet, it was my job as big brother to put cereal and milk on the table and wake Bobby and Katherine. We'd all tiptoe around getting ready for school making as little noise as possible because we didn't want to disturb Momma. You never knew what she'd do. Some mornings she'd rage around the house, screaming at us while we grabbed our books and shoes and ran out without breakfast. Other days, she'd pull on a robe and eat cereal with us at the table, never saying a word, spooning the cereal into her mouth and looking out the window all dreamy, kind of as if she saw something out past the swingset so wonderful and beautiful you couldn't talk about it. Sometimes she'd keep the door to her room closed and you could maybe hear her crying. Since we never knew what to expect, we'd tiptoe around and stay as quiet as we could and hope to make it out the door and just go to school.

BY M. SHAYNE BELL
ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN PICACIO

I was a sophomore that year. Katherine—she'd never let anyone call her anything else: it was always her full name, never Kathy or Kat or Kate—was in eighth grade, Bobby in seventh. Their junior high was across the street from my high school, so we'd walk to school together—the Garrick tribe. In the first block or two from our door, I'd straighten their collars and fuss over their hair, but after those two blocks, once we'd started meeting up with our friends, I'd leave them alone—except for the times when I couldn't, like the morning Katherine looked down and saw she'd pulled on one navy-blue sock and one red sock. It was a rage morning, so none of us was going back for socks. Katherine had stood there with tears in her eyes not knowing what to do. "Come on," I'd said, and Bobby and Katherine and I had run six blocks out of our way to Johnson's Drugstore on Main Street, pooled our lunch money, and since the drugstore didn't sell socks bought a bottle of navy-blue fingernail polish that matched Katherine's navy sweater. I set her on a park bench in the park across the street and painted her toenails. After they'd dried, she put her sandals back on and I told her she looked like a model. She stepped up onto the bench and held herself straight and walked along the edge as if it were a runway. Bobby pretended to take pictures till she jumped off the end. We made it to school before the tardy bell.

But one fall morning, one of Momma's keep-her-door-closed mornings, we walked three blocks and saw Dad's red Ford pickup parked in Selma Thayne's driveway. Katherine had just met up with her friend Tammy Jones, and they were walking along behind Bobby and me. We all stopped and just looked at that truck. I thought it was early for Dad to be working on some stopped-up drain for Selma Thayne, but then Selma stepped onto the porch. She was wrapped in a pink, fluffy robe and she was barefoot despite the cold. She bent over to pick up her paper, and you could see she wasn't wearing anything underneath that robe. Before I could get Bobby and Katherine and Tammy away from there, she looked at me. Even from that distance, I could see her eyes were green—the kind of piercing green you can't forget. She straightened up with a little smile, not a friendly smile, not a nervous one, a kind of know-it-all, I'm-smarter-than-you smile. She'd lived here long enough to know who we were and who our Dad was, and I thought she had no business smiling at us in any way. I wondered if Dad were watching us from behind the blinds in that big front window, and what kind of look he had on his face. I started walking, and the others followed me. None of us said a word. I didn't know if Tammy knew that that was our Dad's pickup, but if she did I was sorry for Katherine.

I wasn't going to—I tried to keep from doing it—but I hadn't heard the screen door close and I knew Selma was watching us, I just knew it. I looked back. Selma was standing there, smiling that smug smile and looking at us with her green eyes.

I couldn't stop thinking about those eyes or about what I'd seen of Selma's body when she'd bent over for the paper and that most of all made me disgusted with myself, made me wild kind of. I couldn't concentrate. I was in a bad mood with my friends. That I couldn't stop thinking about Selma—knowing that Dad had spent the night with her and maybe other nights made me sick to my stomach. I tried to think about math or grammar or geography, but it was no use. All I kept seeing were those breasts and those eyes.

I meant to take another way home after football practice, but somehow I found myself storming up the sidewalk that would take me right past Selma's. Dad's pickup was gone from her driveway, there was that at least, but Selma was sitting on her porch in the cool of the evening, drinking iced tea. I looked away, but I'd seen her eyes again and her smile—inviting this time, not smug. When I looked

back, she'd stood up and she wasn't smiling. The top buttons of her dress were all undone. Part of me wanted to walk across her lawn and up onto her porch to see what would happen, but even while I was thinking that I thought: I'm jail bait. I imagined the trouble I could get her in and how that would surely put a stop to Dad's nighttime visits at least to her—but that made me laugh, I laughed right out loud, and laughing somehow broke whatever I'd been feeling all day. I ran home, kicking up the red and gold autumn leaves on the sidewalks.

Momma had gotten up that day. She was standing at the washing machine smelling a shirt of Dad's. She put it down fast in the water when she saw me, but when I walked back there I could smell perfume: a strong, flowery kind that wasn't Momma's. She crumpled up a paper on top of the dryer and threw it in the trash.

"Let's just eat cereal for supper," she said. "I've been too tired to cook anything."

She and Katherine set the table. Dad's place was empty. Katherine, Bobby, and I knew where he probably was. None of us told Momma.

But she knew. I pulled that crumpled piece of paper out of the trash when I carried it out later, and it was a note from Selma. "Hurry back, Dearest," it read, and she'd signed it. I shoved it back down in the trash where it belonged, but it was perfumed with the same perfume that had clung to Dad's shirt, and it made me remember things I didn't want to remember.

In the night, I woke having dreamed of Selma and her eyes.

The next morning, one of Momma's rage mornings, and just one block from the house, Katherine looked at me and said, "Daddy's bewitched."

"Uh huh," I said.

"Selma's a witch."

"Anybody named Selma's a witch," Bobby said.

"We have to do something," Katherine said.

I'd have laughed if Selma hadn't bothered me so. "Like what?" I said. "I don't know—something to break Selma's spell."

"Dead cat," Bobby said, pointing down the street. "Witches don't like dead cats, do they?"

We walked up to the dead cat. It was black, with white under its chin. "Shouldn't it be all black?" I asked.

"It's black enough," Katherine said. "We should throw it on Selma's porch."

We just stood there for a minute. Bobby giggled, then I giggled. I didn't think Selma was a witch, but throwing a dead cat on her porch somehow seemed the right thing to do.

Bobby and I ended up handing our books and backpacks to Katherine. Bobby took the tail and I took the front paws and we walked along trying not to dip blood on our shoes, the dead cat dangling between us.

Because it was a rage morning, we were walking to school early. No one else was on the street. I didn't like the thought of doing what we were going to do in the morning light—people could be watching out their windows. It wasn't every day, after all, that you saw kids carrying a dead cat down the street—but I sure wasn't going to try to hide the cat somewhere and come back to throw it on Selma's porch in the night. "Run!" I said.

We ran down the sidewalks, past Dad's pickup and across Selma's lawn, threw the cat on the porch with a thump, then ran to catch up to Katherine who hadn't stopped to watch.

We ran all the way to school.

The police didn't come later to take us away. No one had reported us. I smiled every time I thought about the thump that cat had made when it had hit Selma's porch—she'd maybe thought it was the paper.

After football practice, I walked home past Selma's just to see what I would see. Dad's pickup was gone again. She sat on her porch, again. There was a package wrapped in brown butcher paper sitting on the sidewalk. It had my name on it, Richard Garrick, in Selma's fancy handwriting, and it reeked of perfume.

Selma smiled at me and raised her glass of iced tea. Her eyes were hard and mean and green. "Package for you," she said.

"I don't accept packages from strangers," I said, and I hurried on.

Dad wasn't home. Momma was locked in her room. "The dead cat wasn't enough," Katherine said after our supper of cereal.

"It should have been all black, like Richard said," Bobby said.

"It wasn't a spell at all," Katherine said. "We didn't know what we were doing—but here, look at these."

She pulled two books from the public library out of her backpack: *The Blackest Arts: Druidic Practices in Christian Europe* and *Basic Spells of Warding*.

"They had these in the library?" I asked, when what I really meant to ask was, "They let you check these out?" Katherine was just a little girl.

"I told them I was doing a report on Salem for American History," she said. "The spells book doesn't mention throwing dead cats at people's houses, but it does explain how to cast real spells." She opened the book, thumbed through it to a chapter heading with mushrooms engraved around the chapter number. "Toadstools," Katherine said. "They're poison, and witches have always used them in potions and spells. We can use them, too. There're plenty growing back by the trash cans."

She said it all so calmly, then smiled at the end—she thought toadstools were going to bring Daddy home.

"We can smash them all over Selma's porch!" Bobby said.

"Hold on," I said. "We're lucky we didn't get in trouble for the cat. Besides, how will toadstools stop Dad from going to Selma's?"

I didn't want to hurt Katherine, but I didn't want her and Bobby doing crazy things and getting in trouble.

"This is how," Katherine said. "We have to do things in the right order. We have to cast our spell at night, on a night with little moonlight. We have to set the toadstools in a thick row between Selma's front door and Daddy's pickup. Elementals are trapped inside the toadstools, and we ask them to stop Daddy from going back through that door—then we smash the toadstools to free the elementals. Because we freed them, they'll do what we asked—not for long, maybe just for a few days—but maybe long enough. Daddy can cross that line to leave Selma's house, but the elementals won't let him back in. Daddy will have to come home."

I didn't know what to say. Even Bobby was quiet. I pulled the spells book over and thumbed to the chapter about elementals. The book pictured them as light, gauzy little creatures that sleep on dewy plants—and get trapped inside if the plants grow too fast. They die there if someone doesn't release them.

"It's a new Moon tonight," Katherine said. "I'm going."

She stood and pulled on her sweater. Bobby pulled on his, too.

"Are you coming with us?" Katherine asked me.

We took an empty Corn Flakes box and filled it with toadstools, then we hurried the three blocks to Selma's house. I still didn't think there was any magic in what we were doing, but I liked the thought of annoying Selma.

And Dad.

Selma had a light on in a back room. Dad's pickup was in the driveway. I took a toadstool and smeared it on the windshield.

"Not on his truck, stupid," Katherine said. "Come on!"

We ran to the porch. It creaked when we stepped on it.

"Hurry!" I said.

I dumped the toadstools on the porch, trying to be quiet. Katherine whispered the price of freedom to the trapped elementals, and we started smashing the toadstools with our fists. When we heard steps inside, we ran.

"We left the cereal box!" Bobby said.

"Forget it," Katherine said.

That night, I kept dreaming of green eyes. When I'd wake up—all sweaty and scared—I kept thinking I could see them in the closet, out the window, in the shadows by the dresser. I had to get up to turn on the light—me, I thought, as old as I was—but even so I left it on the rest of the night.

I washed my hands again and again, but I could still smell toadstools. After a while, I didn't mind the smell. I imagined the trapped elementals—silvery, almost transparent wisps—flying out around my fists as I'd smashed open their prisons. I imagined them flying up after Dad left in the morning, a barrier against his return.

After school the next day, there were three Corn Flakes boxes on the table, but no note from Dad. The elementals hadn't sent him home. Momma was locked in her bedroom.

We sat at the table and looked at the cereal boxes.

"Well, I'm not opening them," Katherine said.

"Me neither," Bobby said.

"What do your books say about something like this?" I asked Katherine.

"You don't touch another witch's things," she said.

But we couldn't just leave them in the middle of the table forever. I picked up one box and shook it. It sounded like Corn Flakes. I opened it, and it was Corn Flakes. The other two boxes were, too. Selma hadn't returned our toadstools threefold. Dad had just brought home some groceries, though he hadn't left any fresh milk in the fridge. We had only enough milk left for one bowlful apiece.

"Now what?" Bobby asked.

I didn't want to tell them maybe nothing would bring Dad home, that there were maybe no spells strong enough to help us. Dad had stayed away plenty of nights before, but not night after night like this with Selma.

"Toads?" Bobby asked halfheartedly.

"The spell book talks about using worms," Katherine said.

"Selma'd hate worms squashed all over her porch," Bobby said.

"And you'd hate squashing them there," I said.

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WE HAVE TO CAST OUR SPELL AT NIGHT
A NIGHT WITH LITTLE MOONLIGHT.

*Are our lives aligned like the stars in their courses,
or is fate more flexible than that?*

Night Sweats

July 31, Friday Afternoon: Moving In

In space's far reaches, red-shifted radiation marks the universe's beginning, a microwave ghost forever lingering after the Big Bang. When amateur astronomer Meadoc Omura puts her eye to the telescope to see her favorite nebulae, she travels backward in time, and light travels both ways. On August 6, 1945, a great flash illuminated Hiroshima. Photons, radiation, a radio pulse blasted into space. Years and years later, an attentive observer on one of Earth's nearer star systems might catch the twinkle. The past made present, living in the eye.

What has passed does not disappear; it recedes, ever fainter, but never gone, remaining, a ghost. Like what lived in the old house in Harriston that Meadoc bought, like what lived in Meadoc.

BY JAMES VAN PELT
ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL GIBBS



when the sky turned bright, so terribly bright, and seconds later the dirt buried him and the others. The story stuck with Meadoe and when she was a little girl she had nuclear nightmares: a bomber's high-altitude roar, the peace of an early-morning city, a mushroom cloud rising and rising. She thought about Hiroshima a lot, as she studied the stars, when she read quantum physics.

But today Meadoe wondered, should I have bought the house? She stood on the porch, the new key unfamiliar to her touch. It cost so much. The apartment was fine. I could have taken another path than this one, like an electron. She thought about uncertainty. In quantum physics it meant that one could never tell both where an electron was and how fast it was going. It seemed an electron was in all the possible places at the same time. She'd tried to explain that to Joan, her therapist, once, but by the time she got to tachyons, a particle that appeared to travel backward in time, Joan's eyes glazed over.

Of course, in my case, she thought, the uncertainty principle just means should I have signed a 30-year mortgage?

What had looked like pleasant landscaping swallowed the house, and the house itself leaned over her, large and quiet.

Her radio was already unpacked—the movers must have set it up—so she turned it on and an oldies station playing a big band number crackled into life. She opened boxes until late. After eating part of a casserole, after screwing in the new deadbolts, after finding a night-shirt and blankets and a bedroom lamp, Meadoe went to bed.

She fell asleep before she had a chance to hear any sounds her new house made.

At 4:30 am Meadoe woke. For a while she lay still, trying to figure out where she was and why she was so warm. Her blanket felt pounds too heavy, and her arm under the pillow buzzed with the numbness of sleeping on it wrong. A street light cast a pale white shaft alive with dust motes through her window. She decided she was awake for good and might as well unpack some more.

Meadoe sat. "What the heck?" she said into the strange room. Her nightshirt clung to her, and when she pushed the blanket aside, it was soaked. She wrapped her arms around herself and shivered. When she stood by the bed and looked down, there, in sweat, was her outline.

August 1, Saturday Morning. Therapy

Joan said, "The key to your present is in your past." She consulted her notes, her briefcase open on the couch. Curtains still weren't hung, but the house had begun to look like home. Books were dusted and in the bookcase; her antique hook rug covered most of the living-room floor.

Joan flipped to a new page and clicked her pen. "You're still a virgin."

"Thirty-two years and not a tumble." Meadoe kept her hands still in her lap. Old ground it might be, but she didn't feel comfortable discussing it.

"You told me something happened in high school." Joan flicked back a few pages. "Christopher Towne. Basketball player. You knew him from church. He liked the same books you did. On the third date at the Deer Trail Park picnic area he tried..."

"Yes, but he stopped."

"Before he started, did you want him to?"

"What?"

"Start."

Joan hadn't asked that question before. Deer Trail Park sat at the end of a long dirt road south of town. When they'd pulled into the parking lot, Christopher dimmed his lights to keep them from shining into other cars. She picked out Ursula Major and Minor through the front windshield. Beyond the city the stars glittered so clearly. Meadoe shut her eyes.

"I knew kids made out there. I suppose I wanted to."

"You suppose?"

"I wasn't really sure what making out involved. I was 15. Nobody had talked to me about it. I thought it would be like *Wuthering Heights*. I never thought about sex. I still don't."

Joan coughed. Meadoe knew she did that to cover a snicker. "So, you thought one of you would die and the other would pine forever? That's ambitious for a third date."

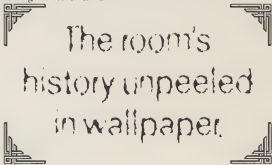
It had been in early November, a few days before her birthday, which is why she remembered—the first cold night of the fall. Windows were fogged in the other cars. Chris had taken her to a movie, then headed to the park without asking.

"No, what I like about *Wuthering Heights* is the second part anyway, after Catherine dies and Heathcliff keeps searching for her. *Wuthering Heights* is a bad example. Maybe I thought we'd hold hands. You know, and then kiss on the porch when he dropped me off."

Joan wrote in the notebook. "Sheesh, were we ever that young? Hadn't you ever had a sexual fantasy with Christopher in it before? You knew you were going on the date; you'd been out with him twice already; didn't you think about anything more extensive than holding hands?"

They had held hands. He turned the engine off and moved next to her. Her hands clasped in her lap, like they were now, and he gently pried one free. She remembered she'd almost giggled at that, partly from nervousness, and partly because it all seemed so awkward. His fingers slid between hers; she couldn't tell if it was her sweat or his.

"I played with dolls still when I was 15. I read *The Girl Scout's Guide to the Stars*," said Meadoe. "I know it sounds silly, but I thought of myself as a little girl. Holding hands was the extent of it. Maybe carving our names in a tree."



She'd thought she should sigh when he squeezed her hand, but she didn't. Her neck muscles bunched; blood pounded behind her eyes. Now that they were there, she longed to leave. Her lips snapped as they parted. "I want to go now," she tried to say. Nothing came out. Chris slid closer. Her left hand was trapped in his; her shoulder pressed against the door, and he leaned to kiss her. There was no place to go, so she let his cheek push her head back to kiss her. It seemed bizarre. No passion within her. If he'd stop, she could ask him if it felt weird to him too. Kissing her hand would be as romantic as this. Rubbing a washcloth over her lips would feel no different. His breath heated her neck, and her shoulder ached where the door pushed into it.

Chris leaned against her harder, turned toward her and wrapped his left leg over hers, forcing her knees apart, pinning her to the seat. He kept kissing her mouth, then the side of her face, breathing hard. "Meadoe," he gasped. His hand worked its way into her blouse, cupping one breast outside her bra. Meadoe tried to twist away from the door, but she had no strength; it was as if her spinal cord had been cut—total paralysis. In her head she chanted, "I want to go home now," in a Dorothyesque way, as if tapping her ruby slippers together would take her from the car.

Joan said, "So when do you think your emotional self caught up with your physical self?"

Meadoe shook her head, her eyes still closed. Chris pulled his hand from her blouse, popping a button. He tugged her belt with one hand and pushed her hand against his crotch. "Meadoe," he said again, his breath full of after-dinner mint. Finally, she found her voice. "I want

to go home now," she said. "I want to go home!"

"This is home," said Joan.

Meadoe opened her eyes, fingers digging into the chair. "Did I say that out loud?"

Joan looked at her thoughtfully. "I think we've covered enough ground for today. But I'll tell you what, when we meet again I'll want to know what you are really afraid of." Joan closed the notebook and put it in her briefcase. She put on her jacket. As Meadoe opened the front door for her, Joan said, "Meadoe, there's two kinds of people who say they don't think about sex—the ones who do and lie about it, and the ones who do but repress it."

August 1, Saturday Afternoon: The Wallpaper

Standing on the porch, her arms filled with contact paper to line the kitchen drawers, Meadoe fumbled with the lock. The new dead-bolt resisted turning at first, then suddenly released. Meadoe imagined for a second someone on the other side had twisted it for her. The radio played the oldies station where the announcer said, "And now Glenn Miller and his band playing Boulder Buff, featuring Billy May on trumpet." Uneasy, she looked around the room. It wasn't like her to leave the radio on. Nothing in the living room was out of place, the back door was securely locked, and the windows were latched.

She sat on the edge of her bed to kick off her shoes. For 14 years she'd lived in the apartment two blocks from the library. In this new setting, her own furniture looked changed, as if someone had stolen her belongings and replaced them with clever counterfeits. Even the air felt alien and smelled strange.

The bed felt good though, so she flopped back. A dozen chores waited. More unpacking, setting up the telescope, but her motivation was shot. Is it true, she thought, that I'm thinking about sex all the time and don't know it?

Through the uncurtained window, the afternoon Sun cast a square of warm light on her legs. She was trying to make patterns from the swirls and texture in the ceiling plaster when she noticed the wallpaper in one corner had peeled away from the wall. Changing the wallpaper topped her project's list, so she levered herself out of bed, slid a stool under the corner and pulled off the first layer. Several sheets stuck to it. The room's history unpeeled in wallpaper. Under a pale yellow, a horrible brown and white geometric; under that, a green marble pattern; under that, a solid pink. The base wasn't wallpaper however. After clearing several feet—the paper fell away easily—she stood back. A movie poster: *The Outlaw*, starring Jane Russell and Jack Beutel. No date, but old, and the paper was laminated to the wall. Licking her finger, she rubbed at a spot, cleaning it. A varnish, she guessed.

A half hour later, all the wallpaper lay crumpled on the floor, and an entire collage was visible: from ceiling to floor and wall to wall, posters, magazine covers, newspapers and pin-ups, carefully arranged, varnish protected, in beautiful condition. Hand-drawn scenes: girls in bathing suits and war planes. Whoever assembled the display was an artist. *LIFE* magazine pictures of models on headdresses: July 9, 1945, a dark-haired woman wearing a striped two-piece suit, her hand to her brow as if looking into the ocean; April 17, 1944, Esther Williams standing in front of a giant seashell; Rita Hayworth sitting on a towel, August 11, 1941. The magazines cost a dime. Other Rita Hayworth images, mostly from movie magazines including a *Time* Magazine painting of her, one hand over her head, her other behind her as if the artist had caught her in a twist, her dress billowing, showing a lot of leg. Ingrid Bergman looked doey-eyed on a *Casablanca* poster, but most of the women she didn't recognize: Martha Raye, Betty Grable, and Maureen O'Hara. Unfamiliar movies: *Four Jills in a Jeep*, *Destination Tokyo* and *Haunted Honeymoon*. In the background, the radio announcer talked about "our boys in the Pacific." Meadoe cocked her head to listen, but a song started, *The Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B*. She rubbed her arms, suddenly chilled.

To one side, surrounded by war news, a striking drawing of a

Japanese woman pursing her lips at a microphone, a rising sun flag behind her. Bare shoulders, half turned, the flag snapping in a wind. Underneath, the card read, "Tokyo Girls." Meadoe touched her own face whose high cheekbones and slanted eyes were mirrored in the drawing. Of all the drawings, this was the best. More life—a sensuousness in the mouth, in the twist in the neck.

"He did a lot of work here," she said to herself. Clearly this was the effort of a young boy. Pin-up girls and war photos. She looked for dates. Nothing past July 1945. Everything was vivid, though. No fading. The display must not have been up long before being covered. Why?

The setting Sun touched her neighbor's roof; she glanced at her watch. There was time to set up the telescope for a little early-evening viewing. Tomorrow she could tackle the collage's mystery.

Once the Sun set in the back yard, the air cooled quickly and mosquitos buzzed. Meadoe slapped at her bare leg as she tightened the viewfinder bracket that held the equatorial mount. The counterweight nearly slipped from her hands when she maneuvered it onto the shaft, but soon she was making the fine adjustments to the viewfinder and the clock drive.

A breeze rustled the lilac. Meadoe rubbed her arms. In the Moon's sterile light, the neighborhood metamorphosed into a black-and-white photograph. Shadows too black to peer into. Trees without color. She thought again about the pictures on her bedroom wall, and turned to look at the house. Gray, moonlit shrubbery rustled. Moonlight reflected off the back door. The pale-green siding now looked white. Meadoe rested her hand on the telescope, at ease for the first time in several weeks. Moving's stress had taken more from her than she thought. It would be a relief to return to work.

She brushed her fingers over the telescope's thin metal, an old friend. They'd spent hours untangling the universe's many twined lights. As long as she had the telescope and the night sky, she'd never be truly unhappy, regardless of whatever Joan said about unacknowledged desires. She chuckled in relief.

Then, a movement caught her eye. She stayed her hand on the telescope. Had something behind her bedroom window shifted?

Whatever it was, it wasn't moving now. Standing stone still, she studied the window. Was that a reflection off wavy glass? Or was it a face looking out? Her eyes froze open; she couldn't take them off the image. Had she locked the front door? She knew she had, or at least she was pretty sure she had. She *always* locked the door when she came in. Of course, she always turned off the radio when she left, but hadn't it been on when she came home?

Keeping her head steady, her eyes focused on the window, she took a step to the left, away from the telescope. The face disappeared.

She stepped back. Moonlight did reflect from the window; the glass was wavy, but it didn't look like a face now, only like shimmery glass. There's no way I could mistake that for a face, she thought. There's no way. She moved again, tried to see a forehead in the reflection, a cheek's curve, the dark shadow under a nose. Maybe it was there, but the Moon had advanced in the sky a tiny bit. Maybe the image required an exact alignment of light and viewer. Maybe there was no image at all, only nervousness about a new house.

Never looking away, she unscrewed the counterweight and slid it off the shaft; its bulk filled her hand reassuringly. The porch door creaked. Meadoe reached around the corner to turn on the light. Shadows fled, and within seconds moths fluttered against the screens. She repeated the move on the backdoor; the back of her hand and wrist screaming their vulnerability when she stuck them in the dark to find the switch.

Light flooded the empty room, and the rest of the house was just as empty. In her bedroom, feeling foolish, she put the counterweight on her dresser.

The posters on the wall almost glowed. Meadoe sat on her bed again, as she had in the afternoon, and studied them. Ingrid Bergman looked wistfully into the distance. Fred Astaire danced across a ballroom floor. The Wolf Man glared straight into the camera. Planes diving. Battleships sailing. VICTORY IN EUROPE trumpeted a head-

line. It's practically a museum, she thought. A moment in time captured on the wall. She thought of her own photographs taken through the telescope, also snapshots in time. The scale was different; some of her subjects were millions of years away, but the principle was the same. Captured time.

She squinted at the wall. There was a pattern in the design, an order. Not straight lines, but lines nonetheless. The *LIFE* covers formed three curves, the hand drawings two more; the movie posters swept in their own arc. News articles and war photos filled the gaps but created a sight line too. It took her a while to decipher the underlying purpose, but as she lay on the bed, letting her eyes roam from image to image, it became clear. All lines led to Tokyo Rose. No matter where one started, the natural flow was to the Japanese beauty.

Later, she read with all the lights on, then decided that was silly. She checked the doors and windows again, flicked the living room and kitchen lights off. With only her reading light on, she closed the book and rested it on her chest. She listened with half an ear to a radio drama about someone named the Great Gildersleeve. Some of it was pretty funny, and it took her mind off sounds she couldn't identify: a metallic rattle that might be a pipe expanding, a thump and buzz that might be the refrigerator cycling, a dog barking. There wasn't enough light to see the posters now, and the window was a gray square leaking moonlight. She worried that someone might look in, and she laughed. No matter what side of the window I'm on, I'm scared of the other! Tomorrow she would hang curtains.

She turned off the window and the light and slipped into a dream. It seemed she'd slept for a long time, and she knew she was dreaming. In the dream she rested on a white beach, like one of the models on the cover of *LIFE*, like Rita Hayworth, and the Sun beat down hot, oppressively hot. Overhead a plane rumbled across the sky, too far to identify, but clearly military, a B-29 maybe. She rolled. In the dream she shifted away from the Sun, but she felt blankets on her shoulders and knew she rolled in bed too. It was so hot, I should find some shade, she thought. I need sun-screen. Waves hissed in the dream. Heat shimmered off the sand blurring the horizon.

Someone stood beside her. It was too hot on the beach, and she robbed her strength, but she could feel him standing there. For a long time he said nothing, and she thought, if only he would set up an umbrella.

Then, he touched her back. His hand was smooth, and the overheated skin felt instant relief. She closed her eyes against the brightness, could feel sand beneath her cheek. The hand moved. It stroked to her shoulder blades and down to the base of her spine spreading coolness the whole way. Meadoc moved into the stroke. Then softly, a voice in her ear.

"Do you trust me?"

She woke, screaming, and the bed was sweat-soaked again. She had to flip the mattress before putting on dry sheets.

In the morning, her linen drawers were open and once folded clothes piled messily within.

August 2, Sunday Morning, Research

The library didn't open until noon on Sunday, so Meadoc dismissed the alarm system before entering. The lights were off. Flyers from different publishing houses touting their newest releases covered her desk, and she moved them aside to give herself room to work. The Real Estate Assessor's Office didn't have a Web page but the City and County Records Office and Building Permits did. She punched in her address. After a few seconds' search, a list of names and dates scrolled onto her screen with her name at the bottom. From 1928 until 1945 the house had two owners: the Belascos who owned it until 1940, and the Shirleys who owned it until September of 1945. Since then the house had changed hands seventeen times. The realtor said young couples bought the house, and then moved out when they had children. Meadoc tapped her fingernail against the keyboard. She typed in her neighbor's address to the north, a house that looked very much like hers from the street. Three own-

ers since '45. The house to the south of her, four owners in the same time period. Across the street, two owners. She checked another dozen addresses in the neighborhood. None had more than four owners since the end of World War II.

Scrolling back up the screen, she returned to the Shirleys. Howard J.T. Shirley bought the house in May of 1940. Margaret L. Shirley cosigned the loan. Wife? Mother? Sister?

A name search for Howard J.T. Shirley brought her to a Shirley genealogical site where she found he died in 1982. Margaret L. Shirley, his wife, died two years later. The site listed one child, Nathaniel Shirley, born January 15, 1929, died August 6, 1945. He was 16 when he died, the same day the atomic age opened its awful eye over Hiroshima. Meadoc could hear her father's voice, thickly accented, "Your grandfather dug all day for the rest of his friends. Dirt covered their faces. There were scars on his arms from broken glass in the rubble."

Nothing turned up on a search of Nathaniel's name.

The historical archives were in the basement. Turning on lights, Meadoc worked her way to the local history shelves. On the top row, Harriston High School annuals. Nathaniel smiled from the juniors section in the 1945 book, and the little hairs on her arms stood straight up as they had when she'd pulled down the wallpaper. She wished she'd brought a sweater.

Nathaniel had light hair with a shiny, sculpted look that most of the boys sported. Glasses. He wore a dark tie, white shirt, and dark jacket. Varsity track. Art club. She thumbed through the annual. Grainy black-and-white photos of football games and victory gardens. At the homecoming dance, several boys were in uniform. Some downtown Harriston buildings in the background of the homecoming parade were familiar.

Prom pictures were in a copy of the school paper, *The Lions Roar*, stuck in the back of the book. On the second page, she found Nathaniel, his arm around a pretty girl with dark hair like her own, but curled instead of straight, hanging to her shoulders instead of trimmed to just under the ears. The caption read: "The Prom's best couple: Junior Nathaniel Shirley and Senior Erica Weiss."

Meadoc went back to her computer. If Nathaniel did the wall art, he didn't enjoy it long before he died. Why did people move in and out of her house so often? Thoughtfully, she typed in a search for "ghosts and poltergeists." Her research offered numerous explanations for ghosts and hauntings. One source suggested that ghosts wanted attention. That's why so many of them threw things. Another argued that poltergeist phenomena was caused by the emotional upheaval of someone in the house, generally a preadolescent girl. Was she effectively "preadolescent"? Could her house be responding to her? One ghost hunter said ghosts recreated the circumstances that held them to the Earth. Another maintained ghosts existed because they had unfinished business.

In the August '45 *Harriston Independent*, on the second to last page, she found Nathaniel under the headline, "Truck Strikes Local Youth." He had been crossing the intersection of Harriston Boulevard and Broadway when a milk truck hit him. The paper reported Nathaniel died at St. Joseph hospital that afternoon of head injuries. Beside the article was the same class picture she'd seen in the yearbook looking so formal, so young in his coat and tie.

Before going home, she stopped at the video store.

"Do you carry *The Outlaw*, with Jane Russell?" Meadoc asked.

The teen cashier keyed the title into his computer and shook his head.

"Four fills in a jeep?" On the wall beside her, Meadoc counted at least 60 copies of the latest release. "How about *The Haunted House* or *Destination Tokyo*?"

"Nope." He hit a key that brought up more information on the films. "Jeeze, those are old. You'd probably have to order them special."

"*Casablanca*?"

"That we have. Two copies. The film's in black and white though. I'm supposed to tell you that because some guy rented it last year and raised a stink because he thought it was defective."

At home she phoned Joan. "I've got curtains to put up, you can help with, and a video to watch if you aren't doing anything."

"I'll bring wine," Joan said.

In the middle of the afternoon, the whole ghost theory seemed suspect. Certainly the apparition in the window could have been her imagination, and maybe she'd messed up her own clothes in the dresser in the middle of the night. She'd never done that before, but she'd never moved into a house of her own either, nor had she had night sweats.

Which was Joan's point an hour later as they hung the bedroom curtains. "There's numerous medical reasons for profuse sweating. You're young for it, but it could be early signs of menopause."

Joan pushed a hook into the drape's back while Meadode held the fabric up. None of the windows was standard width, and the curtains really should have been special ordered, but Meadode couldn't afford that. Custom curtains were on the lengthening list of home improvements. She tried to keep her tone light. "Oh, no. It couldn't be that. My grandmother had a child when she was 43." A medical condition? she thought. Her father spent four months in a hospital

"We all look alike to you," Meadode laughed.

"There's more of the West in you than the East, girl," Joan put a stool under the curtain rod and hung the drapes. "There, now you won't be wondering about peeping Toms in the shrubbery."

Over a glass of wine, Meadode told Joan about her scare the night before and the dream. Meadode looked into her glass as she spoke. Remembering the touch on her back raised new goose bumps. She could still feel the fingers over her skin.

"Doesn't the timing of these things strike you as fortuitous?" said Joan. "I mean, it's pretty obvious that the evening I bring up a delicate topic in our session—ask you what you fear most—your subconscious supplies fears. Of course, the face in the window is symbolic in some way. It could be your repressed self looking out at you, or it could be Christopher Towne coming back in your imagination." Joan laughed. "Or it could have been a funny trick of light. Not everything has a psychological explanation. The dream now, that is interesting. What were you wearing in it?"

Meadode shook *Casablanca* from its plastic box and put it in the VCR. "I don't know. I suppose a bathing suit. He touched bare skin."

Joan settled onto the couch after slipping a coaster under her wine glass. "How do you know that he was a he? You said you only saw feet."

"I... I don't know that either. In the dream I assumed it was a man."

Meadode sat on the couch. Joan moved over to accommodate. It was more of a love seat than a proper couch, not large enough for Meadode to stretch out to take a nap on.

"And you said when he touched you in the dream, you liked it? I'd say that was a good sign. It's obvious the dream has sexual overtones, and you welcomed them."

"The Sun was hot. I was burning up, and his hand was cool. Do we have to talk about it? The movie has started."

Black and white maps appeared on the screen with a voice-over. Lines traced a path through Europe to Casablanca. The narrator said of refugees without visas in Casablanca that their fate was to "wait and wait and wait." She thought about Nathaniel Shirley. What if he was a ghost in this house, caught in his 16th year, and like the refugees, looking for a way to escape?

An Englishman wearing a monocle said, "We hear very little, and we understand even less." Meadode nodded. That made sense. She hadn't seen *Casablanca* before, and it struck her as funny. The music seemed overstated, and the acting stilted. A plane flying in one scene was clearly a model, and the Germans were stereotypical. She wondered how Japanese were portrayed in other films from that era.

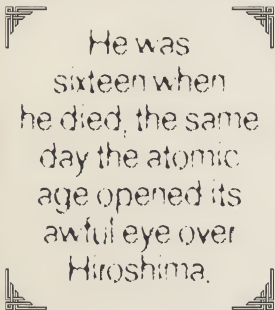
Then a woman walked into the café. Ingrid Bergman. The prefect of police said to her, "I was informed you were the most beautiful woman ever to visit Casablanca. That was a gross understatement." Meadode leaned forward. It was true. She was beautiful. A fragility in the face. Flawless skin. A half smile that changed her appearance from somber to knowing. The pictures on Nathaniel's wall didn't do her justice.

Joan picked up her wine glass and sipped from it. Somewhere in the film Meadode stopped thinking of it as stilted. Her own wine warmed on the table. At the end she cried so hard that Joan put her arm around her until Meadode giggled at the ridiculousness of it.

"It's all right," said Joan. "There must be something in the story that speaks strongly to you. That's why movies are such a powerful medium. They help us live the tales we can't tell ourselves."

An hour after Joan left, Meadode didn't feel tired at all. Normally she was in bed by nine before work, but her mind raced with a million thoughts. With the curtains up, the house seemed homier, more enclosed and safer. She picked up a book, reread the same page twice without understanding a word; put it down. She looked into all the rooms for the 10th time, and then decided a shower might relax her. Afterward, wearing a robe, she poured herself another glass of wine and started the video again.

She noticed details she missed the first time. The young woman who sought Bogart's help was in the opening crowd scene hopefully looking at the plane overhead. Every time an Italian military



dying of colon cancer when she was 12. She remembered how frail his arms became—how thin his face. Cancer killed her grandfather, too. Slow mushroom clouds erupted in his lungs, a part of Hiroshima's omnipresent past.

Joan took three books from her chest pocket and moved down the drape, pushing each one in. "That's the benign explanation. Anxiety provoked by severe repression could cause it too—a purely psychological symptom—but night sweats can accompany diabetes, M.S., AIDS, polio and a half-dozen other things I can't think of off the top of my head. First things first, we ought to get your estrogen checked."

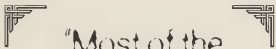
In Meadode's bedroom, Joan examined the wall for a long time, touching some of the pictures, then moving back with her head cocked, as if she were in an art gallery. "Whew! And you think this was all done by a 16-year-old?"

"Not more than a month before he died." Now that Meadode had seen the pattern that drew her eye to Tokyo Rose, it seemed it should be obvious to Joan too, but Joan didn't seem to notice it.

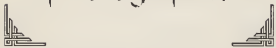
"I always liked 40's hair styles. They struck me as more ... deliberate. This low-maintenance look we all go for now just isn't as romantic. There must be a half a can of hair spray on that woman's head. Oh, look at that." She had found Tokyo Rose. "She looks a little like you, Meadode. Did you notice that? She's beautiful."

officer appeared in the film, everyone ignored him. Señor Ugotti said to Bogart, "I have lots of friends in Casablanca, but just because you despise me, you're the only one I trust," which made Meadoe smile. There were jokes in the first half of the film she hadn't got earlier. She poured more wine, feeling a pleasant torpor steal over her, and closed her eyes. One of the books about ghosts said spirits were doomed to replay the circumstances of their deaths over and over. Is it like video, Meadoe wondered, or can it be changed? Bogie never gets the girl.

In the film, Sam sang *As Time Goes By*. Meadoe drifted. The tune went on and on. "And you must remember this, a kiss is but a kiss, a sigh is but a sigh." She felt she wasn't on her living-room couch anymore, but in a theater watching *Casablanca* on a movie screen, back row. Silhouettes of heads filled the seats in front of her, the woman's hair curled and styled. A curl of her own hair blocked her vision. But my hair is straight! she thought. She shook her head to move it. Buttered popcorn smells. Aftershave. Plush underneath her hands.



"Most of the
people I grew
up with are dead
now. I have their
photographs."



Bogart stared down a glass of whiskey. "Of all the gin joints in all the world," he said.

Slowly, Meadoe realized someone's hand was on top of her left one, the fingers clasped around her hand, very proper and gentle. She didn't move, but let it rest there. It didn't make her feel anxious. Her stomach didn't tighten. This is a good dream, she thought; no contact phobia. Joan would be proud.

At the roulette wheel, the young woman's husband won a lot of money. Bogart had rigged the game so they would win and she wouldn't have to make an unnamed sacrifice to save them both. Everyone congratulated Bogart, and he squirmed. Meadoe sighed. The scenes no longer seemed to be in order, but she liked it just as much. She leaned a little to rest her head on her companion's shoulder. The theater air washed her in warmth, very warm, and sweet trickled down the side of her face. She didn't mind though. She was comfortable. "Yes, Ugotti, I do respect you more," said Bogart.

Her companion turned in his seat. She knew it was a he, and his hand came across her to stroke her other arm. His breath touched her cheek, but she kept watching the movie. Bergman told her husband she'd been lonely in Paris, but she didn't tell him about Bogart. She didn't tell him she'd fallen in love.

The hand on her arm moved. It stroked the side of her breast. Now Meadoe wasn't really watching the movie. She heard it behind

closed eyes. Everything was gentle. Not like the time with Christopher Towne. Very slow. And the air almost burned, as if she faced an oven, but the hand was cool and slow and pleasant. She knew she sat on her own couch in her own living room—she knew she was dreaming—but she also was in a theater. Both places at once. Not alone in either place.

Sam sang again. "It's still the same old story, a fight for love and glory, a case of do or die."

Meadoe sighed. Made a small sound in the back of her throat. Heard herself make it and thought, I'll have to be quiet, or I'll wake myself from this dream.

The hand moved again, to the front of her blouse, parting the cloth (doesn't it have buttons? she thought), and the coolness was on her bare breast, holding it lightly, barely stroking; a thumb crossed her nipple. She turned to offer herself more easily, her breath caught high in her lungs, her skin a thousand times more sensitive than she'd ever felt it before.

Then a loud click. She sat straight up on her couch. The video had finished and ejected. She shook suddenly and realized she was covered with sweat, literally dripping, and the front of her robe was open.

She showered again before going to bed.

Monday morning, on the way to the library, Meadoe bought the video.

August 3 and 4

Monday and Tuesday Night: In the Interim

It took willpower to undress for bed both nights. Even with curtains, Meadoe felt watched. Pictures of her parents on her dresser seemed to have been rearranged. The medicine cabinet door opened on its own accord. No matter where she tuned the radio, it eventually played oldies. She listened to Chet Huntley read the news from a station she couldn't get in the car and there was no listing for in the newspaper. It played polka favorites for an hour at seven.

When she finally turned out her light, she lay rigid on her back, hands at her side, looking at the ceiling. Did a floorboard creak? Did the spoons drawer rattle in the kitchen? She thought, if I shut my eyes and then open them, will a face be staring into my face? Dare I sleep? Can I?

Then so softly at first, so imperceptibly she wasn't sure it hadn't started much earlier and she'd dismissed it, a voice talked steadily. It rose and fell. No words she could distinguish, but it lasted a long time. When it broke off, she stopped breathing, listening as hard as she could. Then sobbing. A young man's muffled weeping as if it were miles away. It was hardly there—no more than wind against the house; no more than a whisper of a sheet dropping across a long, long room, but it was beside her too.

When she slept, she didn't dream. She woke refreshed.

August 5 Wednesday Afternoon: An Interview

Meadoe stood in front of the impressive house for a long time before ringing the bell. What if she decides I'm a loon? Meadoe thought. She stepped off the porch, thinking she might be able to slip away, when the front door opened. An elderly woman with heavily powdered, thin, white hair held the door knob.

"You're the young lady who called from the library? I'm Erica Weiss. Come in. Come in. I've made coffee." Her voice was surprisingly full considering her age, and Meadoe entered the living room.

"Thank you for having me." Dozens of framed pictures hung on the walls from long wires attached to the ceiling molding. The room smelled of vanilla and hand lotion. It wasn't an unpleasant smell but a strong one. While Erica went to the kitchen for the coffee, Meadoe examined the pictures. There were photographs of family groups wearing late 1800's clothing sitting on the grass. Servicemen looked out from some of the pictures. Wedding portraits, graduation photos, parties, snowfalls. Meadoe recognized a younger Erica in one picture standing with what might have been parents. One was of her

wedding. The groom wore a formal military uniform.

"I lost Robert in 1983," said Erica, carrying a tray with cups and a coffee pot. "We'd just inherited the property from my mom and dad. He had a stroke while adding the garage."

"I'm sorry." Meade sat on the edge of the couch, unsure how to ask her questions. Unsure, now that she was here, that she wanted to ask them.

The elderly woman said, "It's a long life, but you've got to live every minute of it. We had a few good years." She balanced a cup on her knee and filled it with coffee, then filled the other and handed it to Meade. "I contributed to the oral history project a few years ago. Young man with a tape recorder came out and asked questions for a couple of hours. Nice fellow, from the university. Don't know what he did with all that blather."

The coffee nearly histered Meade's lip. She hlew across it and took a sip. A rich blend with a hint of licorice. "This is more for me than the library, I'm afraid. I wanted to talk about high school, about Nathaniel Shirley. I moved into his house."

Erica put her cup on the table, then hid her hands in her lap. "What made you come to me?"

"Your picture together in a yearbook. I found drawings in the house that were his. Good art."

Erica swayed a little, and when she reached for her coffee, her hand shook with a palsy Meade hadn't noticed earlier. "He never drew me. I asked him to once, but he said he didn't have the skill yet. He wanted to get me right." Her voice quivered, not nearly as full as it had been at the door. She wiped at her eye. "Sorry, the infirmity of age. So many old friends have passed. I guess Nathaniel was the first."

"Can you tell me about him?"

"It was a long time ago." In the parlor a clock chimed the hour, six mellow gongs. Afternoon Sun fell in a narrow strip along the carpet in front of the living-room window. Meade drank again, almost holding her breath, barely noticing the scalding liquid.

"We started dating at the beginning of my senior year; he was a junior. Many of the older boys had left to Germany or the Pacific so the girls dated younger. He was a beautiful boy. Did you see his picture? He had long fingers, like a sculptor. I thought it was just a fling, of course, so I had a beau at Homecoming." Erica sighed. "Girls now don't understand what it was like then, I think. If a girl today likes a boy, she just asks him out. The feminists have it right; it's a better system, but then—oh, then—a girl sat by the phone. He took me to Homecoming, and we had fun, but I didn't fall in love until the next week. We were in choir. One morning I walked into the room, and there was a drawing of Tokyo Rose on the blackboard, a huge one done in colored chalks—he could really draw Tokyo Rose—and underneath he had written, 'Erica Weiss is lovelier than Tokyo Rose.' He didn't sign it, but we all knew, even the teacher. She didn't erase it. It stayed there all period."

Meade considered the room, the woman. It was hard to imagine her as a high school senior. In the pictures, she was pretty, curly black hair, bright eyes peeking at the camera. Meade couldn't see the young woman in the old one. "I don't know how to ask this; it sounds rude, and I don't mean it to be, but I need to know. Were you two ... serious? I mean ... were you close?"

"Very close." Erica looked at Meade and blushed. "Oh no, nothing like that. It was 1945, after all. Not today. We never ... not ever. Good girls didn't."

"That's not what I meant to imply." Meade tried to smile, but that was exactly the question she wanted answered. The pin-up girls. The touch on her back, the sitting on the couch in front of *Casablanca* were so sexual.

"Well, we were people, of course. Young people. I think most old folk forget how high their juices used to run, and the young ones, of course, believe they've invented sex. We thought about it. We wanted to, but I was firm. I was proper." She looked past Meade at the pictures on the wall. "Most of the people I grew up with are dead now. I have their photographs." She paused. The clock ticked. Meade cupped her coffee, warming her hands. "During the war young kids

had less opportunity than they have now. They chaperoned the dances. My mother called slow dances, 'vertical fulfillment of horizontal desires,' and the chaperones separated you if they thought you were too close. We thought about it though, what with the boys going away to war. Some girls absolutely thought it was their patriotic duty."

"But you didn't?"

"No, we never did." She looked miserable. "I graduated in '45, and I was going to go to college. He still had a year left, but he told me he was signing up that summer, the summer he died."

Talking about his death seemed to have exhausted her, so Meade helped put away the coffee cups.

"Did you see *Casablanca* with him?"

Erica closed a kitchen cabinet softly, hiding cups and saucers by the row. Meade believed most were never used, that the old woman took out the same cup or two every day but never any more. The house seemed bigger now, and more empty.

"We did. At the Denham for an encore showing. It was a couple of years old by then."

Meade remembered the popcorn, the quickening of breath. "Did you sit in the back row?"

They walked toward the front door. Erica paused. "Funny question." She rubbed her brow in thought. "Yes ... you're right. We did. How did you know?"

Meade shrugged.

They said goodbye, but before Meade moved to the porch, Erica put her hand on Meade's arm, stopping her. The old woman's eyes were watery and pale, her gaze steady. "In August that year, my aunt in Fort Collins became ill. My mother left me alone in the house for three days. I was 18. She said she trusted me. For the first time since Nathaniel and I started dating we had an empty house. I was going to go to college. He was joining the army. I called him. He was coming to see me when he had his accident."

Meade nodded dumbly. The woman's grip was intense. Her mouth grim. "He never would have been in the intersection if I hadn't called. All these years, all these years I've known, Nathaniel Shirley died because of me."

August 5, Wednesday Evening: A Visitation

Meade left her car in front of Erica's house and walked home, deep in thought.

Erica's look stayed with her. The old woman's grip on her arm. The way she said "Nathaniel." Never "Nathan." His whole name over and over again. When she'd spoke her final words it was if all the time between had been erased. As if only moments before she'd hung up the phone and sat in her empty house waiting for a boy who never arrived.

A half-hour later as the dusk deepened, she rounded the corner onto her street. No cars were parked in front of houses for once, and none of the neighbors were in the yards. Dinner time, she thought. But as she walked, she slowed. No cars. No people. Just the elms' lazy sway, the stillness of summer lawns, the day's last heat baking through the sidewalk. She turned to look behind her. For a moment nothing moved, and she marveled. This could be 1945, she thought. I have no evidence otherwise. Nathaniel might have seen his street just like this. A plane hummed away in the sky. Sunlight caught it there, way above her, like a golden cross: a four-engined golden cross. She thought, is that a B-29? But when she blinked, it became a jet. A car turned up the street, a mini-van that turned on its lights as it passed and the moment vanished.

At first in the darkness inside her house, Meade didn't notice the disarray. Silverware on the kitchen floor stopped her. Drawers were open. Canned goods scattered across the counters. Couch cushions were on the floor. Art hung crooked on the walls. Meade, clutching her hands to her chest, moved into her bedroom. Sheets on the floor. Dresser drawers open—one was across the room—her clothes emptied from them. Windows and doors were locked. Nothing missing. Nothing broken. Meade picked up methodically. Why would

Nathaniel act out this way? Was it because she visited Erica?

August 5, Wednesday Night, Anniversary

Later, she prepared for bed carefully: a long bath, a single candle lit on the tub's edge, the remains of the wine Joan left. The radio played a nonsense song, "Mairzy doats and doazy doats and liddle lambyz divy." She washed her hair in the tub, sinking back until the water covered her ears, muffling the radio. Everything in her bunched together in tight fists, her stomach, her lungs, her back muscles, as if a race were about to start, but she forced herself to go slow. The wine tasted good. Warm water held her in its hand. Time felt mushy and possible.

She thought about the night of August 5, 1945, where the *Enola Gay* waited for its atomic payload; its crew slumbered in the barracks, while Erica Weiss's mother packed for a trip to Fort Collins. Erica lay down to sleep, thinking about a phone call, thinking about long kisses held on a porch, thinking about a sculptor's fingers sliding across her shoulder, touching her cheek. Nathaniel Shirley stared at his collage until midnight, hearing planes in his ears, watching Ginger Rogers spinning across a dance floor. "Here's looking at you," Bogey said at an airport in the fog. Nathaniel's eyes always ended at Tokyo Rose, her dark hair, the twist in her neck. He thought about touching that hair, except it was never Tokyo Rose he touched in his imagination. It was Erica; her hair curled and smelling of shampoo. Meadoe's grandfather in Hiroshima slept. Old, old light from stars so distant a million lives might have come and gone glittered in the sky.

Meadoe rubbed herself dry. Left the door open. She felt his eyes on her. Pulled on panties and a night shirt and headed for bed. She remembered the *Casablanca* dream where she sat in the theater. In the dream she'd directed herself. She'd turned so her companion could touch her. In the dream she'd had free will. In the dream she'd had curly hair.

11:55 pm. The clock flicked to a new minute. Meadoe lay on her back, eyes part open but drifting, just on sleep's edge, pleasantly buzzed. A wine glass sat on the night table where she could reach it. The radio played in the background, soft dance tunes, horns and clarinets. Big hands. Meadoe licked her lips. Felt herself doing it, knowing that she was almost asleep. A bead of sweat trickled down her forehead. Under the covers, heat pressed her on all sides. Moving slowly, concentrating on the buzz like a pressure point behind her eyes, she pushed away the blanket so only the sheet covered her.

In a dream now, she sat in her front parlor. Sun poured through the front windows. The house was almost intolerably hot, and even leaving the doors open didn't help, but Erica, wearing a thin cotton blouse and shorts, didn't consider it. Mother has been gone for two hours now. She won't be back for three days. Erica's hair stuck to the side of her face, but it was nervousness, not the heat. On the table, the phone waited.

Nathaniel could be here in 30 minutes. Erica thought about his laugh. The way he touched her face. How when he was in the room she felt watery inside and hoped that he would hold her. The phone clicked when she lifted it.

In Meadoe's home, the bed creaked; she incorporated it into the dream, turned it into a creaky chair. Erica held the phone, listening to the dial tone, in the dream, and Meadoe moved aside without opening her eyes both in her bed and in Erica's front parlor. A weight lay beside her, scarcely breathing, and the air baked in the room. For a moment, nothing moved. The dial tone hummed. Meadoe's heart pounded in her ears. A tug on the sheet. It slid off. Erica dialed the operator, waiting between each digit, trying to stay calm. A jostle in the bed. Lips on Meadoe's neck. She scrunched her eyes tight, forcing herself to stay both in the dream and in her bed. A pressure moved off her arm; a hand, moved down her side, over her hip and then rested on bare leg. Meadoe breathed a sound at the touch, tried not to move. What if the hand went away? She

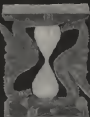
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desperately did not want to wake.

Meadoe held the phone. Pushed her curly hair away from her eyes. One ring. Two rings. In her bed, the nightshirt pushed up, uncovering her belly, uncovering her breasts. Caressed, she pushed into the weight beside her. Felt his length, the heat of him. The hand moved off the middle of her chest. Slid down. Sweat coated her. She floated in it. The fingers paused at her pantie line. She wanted to suck her tummy in to give him access. Wanted those fingers to keep moving down. Wanted his touch.

She talked on the phone too. Nathaniel said he'll come.

Erica ... Meadoe ... Erica ... she didn't know who she was, hunched hand. He'll be here soon, Meadoe thought. Mother is gone. Mother is gone. He'll be here soon.

The fingers stayed still, but the heel of the hand moved closer so Meadoe knew the fingers must be bent, his beautiful, sensitive sculptor's fingers. She gasped, not afraid now that he would hear, and then the fingers slipped under the elastic, touched her hair.

Meadoe moaned, reached down and grabbed the wrist, preventing him from going any lower. "Wait," she said into her room's hot, dark air. "Wait."

Erica put on her shoes. She thought, I should wait. But she opened the front parlor door, rushed. In the dream, Meadoe/Erica ran up the street. Her house was closer to the intersection than Nathaniel's. She should get there first. Her feet blurred beneath her. Up the long hill, made the intersection. He was not there yet. Traffic held her for a minute. Cars, trucks, military vehicles. She crossed.

Meadoe held the wrist. She ached, but she didn't let it move.

A minute later, she saw Nathaniel. He was running, but when he noticed her standing there, he slowed to a walk. A gun stayed on his face. The smile was infectious, and Erica smiled back. They hugged at the same moment across the globe a bomber dropped its single bomb. Roared frantically away. Meadoe Omura's grandfather lifted dirt by the shovelful from the bunker. Around him, other workers moved wheel-

barrels, carried brick, mixed cement.

The traffic light changed, Nathaniel started across, but Erica held him back. A milk truck slammed through the red light and continued down the road. Erica smiled even broader. The bomb hurt and the atomic age arrived. Quantum theory made real.

Nathaniel said, "Wow, good thing nobody was in the street."

Erica nodded. She didn't let go of his arm.

"Pretty warm out, don't you think?" Nathaniel said.

Erica shaded her eyes. "A bit. Maybe we can go some place out of the Sun?"

"Do you have something in mind?"

"Oh, yes," she said, and they walked toward her house.

In her bedroom, Meadoe held the hand still under her belly, and she walked hand in hand with Nathaniel down Harrison Boulevard. They went in her front door. A brief kiss. A fumbling with buttons and snaps. They laughed in the afternoon's warmth, nearly stifling in the house, oblivious to heat and atomic bombs and milk trucks.

Meadoe forced her eyes open to the bedroom's darkness. Their laughter rang in her house, echoey and distant. Moonlight slanted through the window, gathered in a form lying beside her.

His eyes were open, staring into her own across the years. Young eyes, long dead. They blinked.

"I'm not who you think I am," said Meadoe.

The voice barely made it to her ears. It could have been no more than a breeze outside. Her own heart thudding in her veins. As light as a lover's touch. "I know, Tokyo Rose," he said, then the room was empty and 20 degrees cooler.

August 8, Saturday: Final Reel

"So you haven't seen evidence of the 'ghost' since Wednesday night?" Joan pulled her notepad from a briefcase. She was in her

Continued on page 70



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Terese Nielsen is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Endowment for the Arts.

"I LIKE TO BE AVAILABLE TO FANS

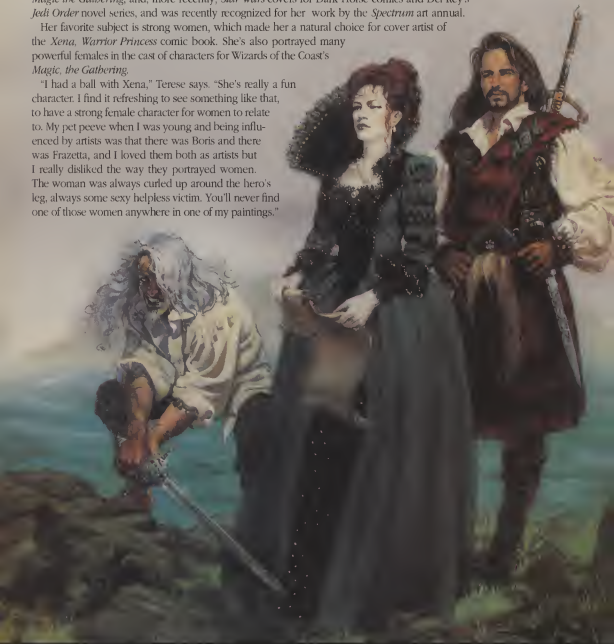
When Terese Nielsen was in art school, a classmate said to her: "You're so talented, one of the best in the whole school, but you'll never really make it because you're a woman." Did she ever prove him wrong.

Beginning with comic books, Terese Nielsen has triumphed in the "boys' club" of professional illustration, becoming a dominant influence on gaming art. What's more, she's made it look easy.

Terese has illustrated comic books, superhero trading cards, computer game covers, cards for *Magic the Gathering*, and, more recently, *Star Wars* covers for Dark Horse comics and Del Rey's *Jedi Order* novel series, and was recently recognized for her work by the *Spectrum* art annual.

Her favorite subject is strong women, which made her a natural choice for cover artist of the *Xena, Warrior Princess* comic book. She's also portrayed many powerful females in the cast of characters for Wizards of the Coast's *Magic, the Gathering*.

"I had a ball with Xena," Terese says. "She's really a fun character. I find it refreshing to see something like that, to have a strong female character for women to relate to. My pet peeve when I was young and being influenced by artists was that there was Boris and there was Frazetta, and I loved them both as artists but I really disliked the way they portrayed women. The woman was always curled up around the hero's leg, always some sexy helpless victim. You'll never find one of those women anywhere in one of my paintings."



AND BUDDING ARTISTS, ESPECIALLY THE ARTISTS."

Terese's women may be sexy but they're definitely not wimps. These are powerful figures, muscular and commanding, often posed in provocative and confrontational stances. Although the very nature of gaming-card art requires a certain iconic composition, Terese takes it to a new level. Consider "Shasta," a woman of color who looks aggressive enough to leap into her own comic book in the next eye-blink. Shasta may be wearing a G-string but watch out for her cowboy boots—and spurs. Or check out "Tinkerbell," whose ghostly flesh nipples with muscles that would make a weightlifter proud. This is one fairy who might not have much patience with the Peter Pan Syndrome.

Terese is able to depict just about any subject, whether macabre, action-oriented, or romantic, with enormous skill and speed. Her powerful colors, masterful line work, and "in your face" composition have brought her the admiration of art directors and fans around the world. One art director for Wizards of the Coast told her, "You're one of the few artists I don't pigeon-hole. You do everything well."

She grew up in a sort of "boys' club" on an isolated farm in Nebraska with only two brothers for playmates. Her older brother, Ron Spencer, is a considerable artistic talent, and strongly encouraged her to pursue her muse. By dint of hard work, talent, and determination, Terese learned how to hold her own amid considerable male competition at home, and later at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena.

One reason for Terese's flexibility and range is her restless creative energy. "I find myself constantly shifting as to what it is I think I want to do. I thought I wanted comics, and I got into that, and that was great, and then, well, that wasn't what I wanted anymore. And then the gaming stuff looked really cool, so I got there, that's been really exciting because there's so much variation in what you can do. And then my focus has been more on bookcover work which I've liked a lot. It seems like I get to one place and I'm already ready to move into another spot."

A constant in her creative life has been the gaming fans, and her longtime association with Wizards of the Coast. Terese likes to stay in touch with the fans by attending gaming conventions around the globe, and Comic Con in San Diego. Her Web site upkeep a constant schedule of her appearances, and she's putting together a newsletter so that followers of her work will be able to keep up with her activities.

"I like to be available to fans and budding artists, especially the artists. I've had such great teachers and I'd like to repay my debt to them by helping other young artists."

Although Terese is completely at ease depicting action scenes and muscular heroes like "Gerrard" for a 1998 *Duelist* cover, she says that she's beginning to explore personal work in a softer, more romantic vein.

"I'm thinking now of working on more personal pieces and commissioned work. Helping other people bring their ideas and images to life is particularly satisfying. I find the collaboration of working with other people to make their dreams come true really exciting. With works like *Stream of Life*, and *Moon-sprite*, Terese reveals her love of color and texture,

and a desire to move toward more painterly effects in her work.

Speaking of "romantic veins," Terese's portrait of *Vampirella*, may be the first depiction of a Pre-Raphaelite vampire. The loose brush technique and treatment of light and shadow creates a haunting romantic composition evocative of the artists who were working at the beginning of the 20th century. Terese admits that this work is a bit of an homage to one of her favorite artists, the 19th century Romanticist J.W. Waterhouse.

RIGHT: Archangel is a calendar piece for the game Magic the Gathering. Nielson enjoyed putting children into paintings. LEFT: J.W. Waterhouse was the inspiration for Vampirella.

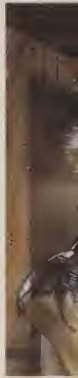


CONSIDER "SHASTA," A WOMAN WHO LOOKS AGGRES



SHE WAS BORN WITH THE POWER TO LEAP INTO HER OWN COMIC BOOK.

HER FAVORITE SUBJECT IS STRONG WOMEN.





Gustav Klimt is another artist whose impact can be seen in Terese's work, both in its highly decorative and patterned aspects, and in her use of gold leaf. Although gold leaf can be a tricky medium to master, Terese enjoys both the challenge and the final effect. "I just love working with it. It gives the painting a special quality, and it reproduces beautifully." Klimt's influence can be seen in many of Terese's more decorative works, some of which she calls "jewels," including *Miss Million*. In this work, the composition, dark-haired subject, and stunning array of decorative motifs helps the painting transcend the gaming-art genre.

Before you go off thinking that Terese is only interested in techniques of the past, you ought to know that she has also begun to use the computer in her work.

"In a recent *Star Wars* painting for Dark Horse, I did a kind of romantic piece with Luke Skywalker and this Mara Jade that he marries. And in the side panel in a sort of Gustav Klimt-ish way, framing it, I had these roses all the way down the side. I shot a bunch of photos and Photoshopped them into the sketch, then printed the sketch out and went in and painted on top of that."

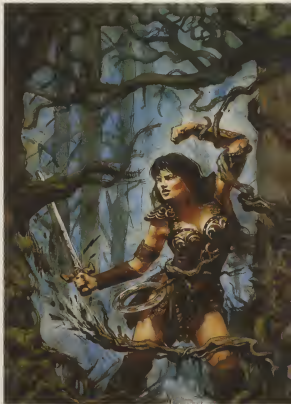
"But I'm still in love with having an actual piece of hand-done art for the finished product. The computer is a wonderful tool, and I plan on utilizing it, but I think I'll always try to stick with my end product being a piece of art that's hand-generated. I like my fingers to get messy and to smell the fumes and all that. I'm an old-fashioned artist in that way."

She moves from acrylic to watercolor to prisma pencil, combining and adding whatever she thinks will work, be it collage, airbrush, or the above-mentioned gold leaf. "I guess I work pretty fast. I throw in backgrounds with splattering and washes, and dive right into the face and hands of the figure. Once the face is working, that's really what tells the story of the character. I like suggesting rather than noodling out every blade of grass. I like to give the viewer credit for having intelligence and creativity to participate in the work."

Terese uses models as often as possible. "If I can shoot reference for it, I always do. The less I have to make up, the better." Occasionally, the only model available is the artist herself, which can result in some unexpected gender-bending, as in the case of the character Taliesin in the *Fortuneteller* card game. Terese cheerfully admits that Taliesin is really a portrait of herself, with a mustache.

One can't help wondering if Terese wasn't tempted to twirl that mustache in glee. For an artist who has busted a few gender stereotypes as she's conquered the comics and gaming field, it would definitely be a fitting gesture.

Terese Nielsen's website address is: www.TNielsen.com



OPPOSITE PAGE: *Mystery and magic abound in Empire of Unreason, a cover for J. Gregory Keyes's novel. TOP: The strung elfin Tinkerbell who likes to fix and build machines for Fasa's Shadow Run game. RIGHT: Nielsen's drew Xenia: Warrior Princess for Dark Horse Comics. ABOVE LEFT: A Moonspire for Magic the Gathering cardgame is one of her all-time favorites. Gustav Klimt was her inspiration for it.*

Baldur's Gate II Gives Dungeons & Dragons players an adventure on the PC.

THE BEST WAY TO PLAY *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* ON THE PC IS BACK ON THE SHELVES with the sequel to Black Isle Studio's award-winning *Baldur's Gate*. Their new title is *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn*, and although it is a sequel, it does not pick up immediately where the previous BG left off. In the first game, the player took the role of a bastard child with a special heritage. The character made friends, built an adventuring party, and completed quests, all while trying to solve the mystery of the character's birth and an iron shortage plaguing the *Forgotten Realms* Sword Coast. If the player solved the game, then the character won the climactic battle.

Now in *BGII*, the main character starts off in a prison, held by an anonymous jailer. The plot sets the character free to find his friends and discover who the jailer is and what his plans are. The time in jail sets the stage for another epic story, this time centered in the City of Coin, Athkatla, the capital city of Amn, the merchant's nation. Quests also take the character to the city of Tradement, various hamlets, and the wilds of Amn.

Besides a new plot line, *BGII* has several changes from the first game. The Infinity engine has been upgraded so it can run the game at 800 x 600 resolution. Also added are 3-D spell effects and environmental audio support.

These game-play enhancements are used to display monsters that are much harder than those in the first game. *BGII* includes every golem in the *D&D* monster manual, several creatures that drain the character's levels, mages with the Disintegrate spell (which per-

manently destroys characters), beholders whose very gaze can disintegrate or turn to stone, and lots more.

The characters in *BGII* are higher level than they were in the first game, so they have more magic available to them. This makes the game more strategically oriented. The game will present the party with a problem. Most likely simply storming forward will get the party killed, but it is also likely that some combination of powers and spells in the party's possession can defeat the problem. The challenging part is finding the right combination. Save early and often, because usually the only way to gauge the whole of the problem is to let it kill the party a time or two. If the player doesn't like saving and loading, *BGII* has a difficulty setting, a first for Black Isle games. At the Novice setting, all monsters do half damage, the characters gain maximum hit points per level, and all spells are automatically learned when scribed. The settings increment up from there to the Insane setting, where the characters are doing the half damage and the monsters are respawning.

Dungeons & Dragons is built around its core character classes, and thus so is *BGII*. Each class, however, is subdivided into subclasses like Paladins and Rangers for the Fighter, Assassins for the Thief, and so on. *BGII* adds new subclasses for all of the core classes. Just like everything else, they each have their good and bad parts, and all of them seem to be represented by characters in the game. Like spells, none of the new skills is useless, but the player has to find the proper time and place to use them.

The power level of *BGII* being what it is, the player's character doesn't just adventure in the game world, the character helps actually shape it. For example: If played the right way, the characters become lords of their own keep which will then generate its own money. Of course, as the new lords of the manor, the characters have to return occasionally to give audiences to their subjects. On a smaller scale, there is more interaction between members of the party. Party members talk to each other and the conversations affect love interest, morale, and party composition. All characters have a quest in their background. The party can lose that character, if the party won't help when the quest comes up. Nearly all the quests, regardless of where they come from, work with the plot. And lots of them have a time limit, so it is impossible to do them all.



ABOVE AND RIGHT: Protagonist Julie hacks and shoots anyone trying to stop her from restoring peace to the galaxy in Heavy Metal: F.A.K.K.2

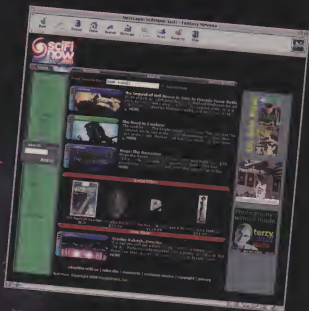


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ances. The fantasy setting allows the game to have rules that wouldn't work in a historic rail building game. Play is fast and simple. Depending on the terrain, players can build track more cheaply by hiring a foreman from one of the game's alternate races—Elves for the forest, Catmen for the jungle, and so on.

The computer game includes new art, animations, and computer play aids not found in the paper-and-dice version. Players have their choice of the new, full-color art and map or the classic art and map. The animations are linked to various game events, as are the sound effects. The music, however, is mostly there to be disabled. The computer aids, on the other hand, are very handy for finding cities and locating loads, plus for building rails and moving trains.

Unlike *BG* and *HM*, *RE:ID* is not a hard drive and memory hog. Because the graphics, maps, and sounds are all so small, the game runs perfectly well on older, slower, less tricked-out machines than those required by the other two. At the same time, *RE:ID* is an improvement over its paper-and-dice version because it is as easy to start and play as a video game. There is an extensive manual, but the Quick Start rules can get anyone playing in minutes, and the computer is there to keep you from playing "wrong."

The one warning about the game is that the Artificial Intelligence is not very good. It is adequate to learn the game against, but once you've mastered the rules, you'll need a real human opponent to be really challenged. Fortunately, Eden maintains a server for matching players in Internet games, and they keep rankings so that you can play people of your own ability. The chat window is well designed so it is easy to change between it and the main screen of play.

Overall, an excellent port of good game. Well worth the money, particularly if you have some friends to play it with.

Meanwhile, back in the paper-and-dice world of *Dungeons & Dragons*, the roll out of the Third Edition continues apace. What is striking about it, however, is that the first adventure module to be put out for the new edition is not published by Wizards of the Coast. It comes instead from Atlas Games and is called *Three Days to Kill*. Odder still is that Atlas paid no license fee to publish it. Instead they took advantage of the Open Gaming License that Wizards has issued their D20 system under. What the license basically means is that you can write anything for *D&D*, except a character creation system, and publish it with-

out owing Wizards a dime. Wizards believe they can do this because even when they controlled all the copyright on the First and Second Editions, most of their profit came from selling *Player's Handbooks*. Thus they are letting other people carry the cost of publishing unprofitable supplements in the firm belief that the existence of those supplements will spur demand for the *D&D* core books.

Three Days to Kill is a "hard fantasy" adventure with some interesting twists written by John Tynes. It is a 32-page staple-bound adventure for a first-to-third-level party of characters. It is not, however, exactly what most people will be expecting for a night of playing *D&D*. *TDTK* is more in the style of *Shadow Run* or *Delta Green* than in the style of the *Steading of the Hill Giant Chief*. The players are hired basically as a hit squad to break up a meeting between a bandit chief and his new allies. The adventure is the trip to the meeting and clash with the bandits. Lots of good encounters and lots of threads for continuing a campaign.

Another good adventure, this one from AEG for their *Legend of the 5 Rings* game, is *Lesser of Two Evils* by Jim Pinto. The events center around Lord Yasuki Rama. He has been accepting tribute and taxes from a shrine illegally located on the outskirts of the Shadowlands. For years he has been accepting the

easy money, but now the shrine and its inhabitants need his help. If he calls on his samurai brethren to help the Shrine, they will learn he has been accepting illegal money and he'll be ruined. Now he must turn to the Players for help. The duty-bound Players must help the inhabitants of the Shrine, but where does the evil truly lie?

The first tournament adventure ever released for *L5R*, *LoTE* is more straightforward than most adventures in the line. The plot is very linear because all the people who play are supposed to encounter and experience the same things. It is designed for six midlevel characters, and seven pregenerated ones are provided. Also included are two new spells, a never before seen ancestor, a new oni (demon), a sacred nemuranai (magical item), and a black magic relic. All in all *LoTE* is probably a better introductory adventure to the *L5R* than the one in the rule book, but it will be a nice change up for characters in an ongoing campaign.

Lastly this month, I want to mention not a game, but a comic book. It is called *Dork Tower* and it is created and self-published by John Kovalic. It is also a comic



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FOLKROOTS

Continued from page 27

flicker have been tested on focus groups, people prefer the flickering because it makes the picture seem more "alive.")

An alien anthropologist would probably conclude that television held great religious significance in our lives because of the prominent place it holds in the typical household, much like an altar in other cultures. In fact, in recent years, with the introduction of the large format flat screens, television has become even more of a substitute for the theater, which I compared, earlier, to a place of worship. And that brings me back, full circle, to the issues I brought up at the beginning of this essay.

If we draw out the analogy and consider television to be a modern and technological parallel to the most primitive extant natural religious tradition, then where does that lead us? Consider, for a moment, the general categories of what gets communicated via television: news, weather, finance, education, and entertainment. The first three categories are parallel to the immediate utilitarian function of the Dreaming as a medium for finding food and shelter. The latter two categories are comparable to the mythic function of the Dreaming. But there is a profound and fundamental difference in what underlies television and the Dreamtime.

The unpleasant truth is that television's primary function is to make money; it is an offshoot of a technology-controlled *primarily* by financial organizations and military governments (who use the radiowaves to protect their interest in their nations, which means the ownership of land, capital, and natural resources). On the other hand, the primary function of the Aboriginal Dreamtime is to keep humans in their proper relationship to the earth and cosmos. Whereas western laws are made by those whose best interest is to exploit the earth for the sake of accumulating power and wealth, Aboriginal Dreamtime Law clearly forbids the unnecessary exploitation of the earth for human convenience.

We modern humans have been unwittingly recreating, through the use of advanced communication technologies, a virtual Dreamtime. It is a substitute for what may be an innate human ability (call it psychic potential if you will) that the Aborigines have kept alive for thousands and thousands of years. The irony is that, in the process of recreating a Dreaming, which characterizes a most "primitive" culture that lives lightly on the planet, we, the most "civilized," have actually given up and further inhibited our natural potentials with a lifestyle that is killing the planet. In the religion of the Dreaming, the Aborigines have a clear sense of where they will go at the end of the world. We should ask what the Dreamtime of television really promises us. ♪

NIGHT SWEATS

Continued from page 59

therapist's mode now, harder, more brusque than Joan the friend.

"No. He's gone." Meadoc leaned back in her chair.

"How can that be? You didn't change history. He still died on August 6, 1945. You told me Erica Weiss believed it was her fault, that she still believes it, so why would he disappear?"

Meadoc smiled. "I don't know, really, but I don't think I changed history. I changed the ghost. It's quantum physics, like I told you before—the uncertainty principle. Individual electrons are in all possible positions. History plays itself out in all ways."

"Parallel worlds?" Joan wrote on the pad, and Meadoc couldn't tell if she was taking her seriously or not, but she didn't care. Couldn't Joan feel it in the house? How much sweeter the air was? How much easier it was to breathe?

"Maybe, but I don't think it's that simple. Parallel spirits maybe. The worlds aren't discrete. Nathaniel intersected here. I just showed him another way it could have turned out."

Joan tapped her pen against the page. "You sound different. What's going on?"

"Remember last week when you asked me what I feared most?"

Joan nodded.

"I found out what it was, and I conquered it."

"In the dream?"

"In the dream." She remembered holding Nathaniel's hand back. She'd said, "Wait," and he'd stopped. The power was in her then; it was in her now. She had control. "Come on, I want to show you something in the bedroom."

"What?"

"You'll see."

In the bedroom, Joan looked around. "Did you clean the windows? It seems brighter in here."

Meadoc shook her head. She hadn't noticed it before, but Joan was right. The room was brighter. She sat on the edge of the bed, waiting. Joan paced the room.

"Look at the collage," said Meadoc.

Joan contemplated the wall and found it almost immediately. "Where's Tokyo Rose? And who is that? How did you get that picture under the varnish?"

Meadoc smiled. She'd seen it Thursday morning when she awoke, happy, nearly ready to sing, and she'd lain in the bed in languid glory. Her eyes followed the LIFE covers to the drawing, only it wasn't Tokyo Rose anymore. Smiling from the penciled portrait, as stunning as any of the movie stars, a black-haired girl, curls waving around her ears. Erica Weiss. In Nathaniel's hand, a date, August 7, 1945.

Joan said, "He was already dead."

Meadoc bounced against the bed's edge. "Just in this world, Joan. Just one of him." ♪

BREAKING SPELLS

Continued from page 49

"Not if we pounded them with a hammer."
"Look," I said. "We're not wizards and witches. Neither's Selma—"

"Oh, she is," Katherine said. "You don't have to believe it, but she is. We have to do something to make her let Daddy go."

"Forget the frogs and worms," I said. "We're not throwing any more dead or disgusting things on Selma's porch."

Katherine and Bobby looked down. They wouldn't look at me. We all sat there hungry in that quiet house while our parents lost their minds.

"There must be something we can do," Katherine said. She pulled her books on magic out of her backpack.

"Maybe there is," I said.

"Magi?" Bobby asked.

"Maybe it is," I said.

We ate our cold cereal, then we wrote letters to Dad. Please come home, I said in mine. Mother can't take this, and we miss you.

I don't know what Bobby and Katherine wrote.

"We can't just take letters," Katherine said. "We have to cast a stronger spell—we should take things to leave with the letters that will make him know we're thinking of him."

"Or make him remember us," I said.

I took my old baseball mitt, the one Dad had given me when I'd turned seven and he'd had time to throw a ball to me in the backyard. Katherine took a teddy bear, Bobby his red truck. We walked quietly to Selma's porch. I set my letter in the hand of the mitt. Katherine put hers on the teddy bear's lap. Bobby put his in the truck bed of the truck. We left them lined up in the moonlight of the new Moon.

When I woke to the smell of bacon frying, I believed in magic. I walked downstairs, and Dad was cooking breakfast. There was a baseball mitt and a teddy bear and a toy truck in the middle of the table.

We didn't say a word to each other, but Dad hugged Katherine and Bobby. When Momma walked down, he hugged her and she started to cry and Bobby said the bacon's burning and Momma started tending to that and before long we had bacon and eggs and toast and milk and orange juice on the table.

We took a different route to school. I didn't want to walk past Selma's house ever again.

"You were right," Katherine said to me.

"No, you were right," I said. "We broke a spell." I didn't know how long it would last. I didn't know if it would last even a day. But maybe it would. Maybe we'd have other mornings like this. I fussed at Bobby's hair. Our sweaters smelled like bacon. ♦

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THE MAN

Continued from page 45

question Azhran. They waited meekly as two children in the chariot's back, gaping now at Azhran's black eagle wings of cloak, that every so often buffeted them, almost breaking their ribs, or at the world falling down and down below like something dropped.

But then, high in the wild, tipsy-making upper air, Jaqir did speak, if not to Azhran.

"King, I tricked you. I did not steal the Moon."

"Who then stole it?"

"No one."

"A riddle."

At which they saw Azhran had partly turned. They glimpsed his profile, and a single eye that seemed more like the night than the night itself was. And they shut their mouths.

On raced the dragons.

Below raced the world.

Then everything came to a halt. Combing the sky with claws and wheels, dragons and chariot stood static on the dark.

Azhran let go the jewelry reins.

All around spangled the stars. These now appeared less certain of themselves. The brighter ones had dimmed their glow, the lesser hid behind the vapors of night. Otherwise, everywhere lay blackness, only that.

In the long, musician's fingers of the Prince of Demons was a silver pipe, shaped like some sort of slender bone. Azhran blew upon the pipe.

There was no sound, yet something seemed to pass through the skulls of the king and of Jaqir, as if a barbed thread had been pulled through from ear to ear. The king swooned—he was only a king. Jaqir rubbed his temples and stayed upright—he was a professional of the working classes.

And so it was Jaqir who saw, in reverse, that which he had already seen happen the other way about.

He beheld a black cloud rising (where before it had settled) and behind the cloud, suddenly settling incandescently blinked and dazzled. He beheld how the cloud, breaking free of these blinks of palest fire (where before it had obscured said fire) ceased to be one entity, and became instead one million separate flying pieces. He saw, as he had seen before when first they burst up from the ground in front of him, and rushed into the sky, that these were a million curious birds. They had feathers of cinnabar and bronze, sinews of brass; they had clockworks of iron and steel.

Between the insane crowded battering of their wings, Jaqir watched the Moon reappear, where previously (scanning the night, as he stood by Yulba in a meadow) he had watched the Moon put out, all the birds flew down against her, covering and smothering her.

Unbroken by their landing on her surface, they had roosted there, drawn to and liking the warmth, as Yulba had directed them with his sorcery.

But now Azhran had negated Yulba's powers—which were little enough among demons. The mechanical birds swarmed round and round the chariot, aggravating the dragons somewhat. The birds had no eyes, Jaqir noticed. They gave off great heat where the Moon had toasted their metals. Jaqir looked at them as if for the first, hated them, and grew deeply embarrassed.

Yet the Moon—oh, the Moon. Uncovered and alight, how brilliantly it or she blazed now. Had she ever been so bright? Had her sojourn in darkness done her good?

End to end, she poured her flame over the Earth below. Not a mountain that did not have its spire of silver, not a river its highlight of diamond. The seas lashed and struggled with joy, leaping to catch her snows upon the crests of waves and dancing dolphin. And in the windows of mankind, the lamps were doused, and like the waves, men leaned upward to wash their faces in the Moon.

Then gradually, a murmur, a thunder, a roar, a gushing sigh rose swirling from the depths of the Flat Earth, as if at last the world had stopped holding its breath.

"What did you promise Yulba," asked Azhran of Jaqir, mild as a killing frost, "in exchange for this slight act?"

"The traditional favor," muttered Jaqir.

"Did he receive payment?"

"I prevaricated. Not yet, lord Prince."

"You are spared then. Part of his punishment shall be permanently to avoid your company. But what punishment for you, thief? And what punishment for your king?"

Jaqir did not speak. Nor did the king, though he had recovered his senses.

Both men were educated in the tales, the king more so. Both men turned ashen, and the king accordingly more ashen.

Then Azhran addressed the clockwork birds in one of the demon tongues, and they were immediately gone. And only the white banner of the moonlight was there across the night.

Now Azhran, by some called also Lord of Liars, was not perhaps above lying in his own heart. It seems so. Yet maybe tonight he looked upon the Moon, and saw in the Moon's own heart, the woman that once he had loved, the woman who had been named for the Moon. Because of her, and all that had followed, Azhran had turned his back upon the world—or attempted to turn it.

And even so here he was, high in the vault of the world's heaven, drenched in earthly moonshine, contemplating the chastisement of mortal creatures whose lives, to his immortal life, were like the green sparks which had flashed and withered on the chariot-wheels.

The chariot plunged. The atmosphere scalded at the speed of its descent. It touched the skin of the Earth more slightly than a cob-

web. The mortal king and the mortal thief found themselves rolling away downhill, toward fields of barley and a river. The chariot, too, was gone. Although in their ears as they rolled, equal in their rolling as never before, and soon never to be again, king and thief heard Azhran's extraordinary voice, which said, "Your punishment you have already. You are human. I cannot improve upon that."

Thus, the Moon shone in the skies of night, interrupted only by an infrequent cloud. The king resumed his throne. The four angels—who were or were not parrots—or only meddlers—sat on their perches waiting to give advice, or to avoid giving it. And Jaqir—Jaqir went away to another city.

Here, under a different name, he lived on his extreme wealth, in a fine house with gardens. Until one day he was robbed of all his gold (and even of the moon-pebble) by a talented thief. "Is it the gods who exact their price at last, or Another, who dwells farther down?" But by then Jaqir was older, for mortal lives moved and move swiftly. He had lost his taste for his work by then. So he returned to the king's city, and to the door of the merchant's wife who had been his mistress. "I am sorry for what I said to you," said Jaqir. "I am sorry for what I did to you," said she. The traveling merchant had recently departed on another, more prolonged journey, to make himself, reincarnation-wise, a new life after death. Meanwhile, though the legend of a moon-thief remained, men had by then forgotten Jaqir. So he married the lady and they existed not unhappily, which shows their flexible natures.

But miles below, Yulba did not fare so well.

For Azhran had returned to the Underearth on the night of the Moon's rescue, and said to him, "Bad little Drin. Here are your million birds. Since you are so proud of them, be one of them." And in this way Azhran demonstrated that the world no longer mattered to him a jot, only his own kind mattered enough that he would make their lives Hell-under-Earth. Or, so it would seem.

But Yulba had changed to a clockwork bird, number one million and one. Eyeless, still able to see, flapping over the melanic vistas of the demon country, blotting up the luminous twilight, cawing, clicking, letting fall droppings, yearning for the warmth of the Moon, yearning to be a Drin again, yearning for Azhran, and for Jaqir—who by that hour had already passed himself from the world, for demon time was not the time of mortals.

As for the story, that of Jaqir and Yulba and the Moon, it had become as it had and has become, or *un*-become. And who knows but that, in another little while, it will be forgotten, as most things are. Even the Moon is no longer *that* Moon, nor the Earth, nor the sky. The centuries fly, eternity is endless. ▀

ing both Stasheff's pluses and minuses in a hopefully objective way.

On the plus side, Stasheff has a light touch which propels his story effortlessly. Opening chapters introduce us to the newest characters, two natives of the planet Oldeira, Mira and Blaize. Next the stage is quickly set for the arrival of the sharply delineated heroes, Rogue Wizard Gar Pike and his new assistant Alea. The latter are spacefaring emissaries of a technological culture that also uses psionics, the hypothetical science of mind powers so beloved of legendary genre editor John Campbell. What Mira and Blaize perceive to be magic are really just well-espoused talents, and Pike and Alea are experts among amateurs. Thus they are able to land on Oldeira, train Mira and Blaize, and foment a revolution against the evil rulers, all in the space of six weeks. End of adventure, tune in next week.

Stasheff employs a transparent style that offers no impediment to easy identification with his characters, although a few stale phrases ("heart in her throat and a prayer on her lips") crop up amidst the generally well-chosen words. Characterization is limited but engaging, including a burgeoning love affair between Mira and Blaize, and with the introduction of philosophical issues (Taoism is "the Way" of the title), Stasheff provides a modicum of real intellectual substance.

However, the leavening of humor never really rises higher than pratfalls and puns and trivial bickering. And reliance on assumed backstory means that potentially intriguing characters like the stowaway alien Evanescence are trotted out and run through their paces without real significance. And as with Harry Harrison's equally antique *Stainless Steel Rat* series, I experienced the sense that Stasheff's heart is not really in these prolonged adventures.

I felt fourteen years old again reading this book—but that's one year beyond the fabled age of total credulity.

When C. J. Cherryh introduced the template of dominating female adventurer and subservient male sidekick into Fantasy with her *Gate of Ivrel* (1976), she struck pure psychosexual gold. There's still plenty of ore in this vein, as evidenced by Martha Wells's *Wheel of the Infinite* (AvonEos, hardcover,

\$24.00, 355 pages, ISBN 0-380-97335-9). After all, it's not every Fantasy novel that dares to depict a tough woman buying her complaisant man some new earrings and then admiring how the ornaments look on him.

Wells's exotic foray into Orientalism, complete with metaphysical twists, stands out from standard tales of questing and swordplay. First, consider the imaginary world she builds. It combines elements of Mayan, Hindu and Tibetan culture into a believable whole faintly reminiscent of Robert Silverberg's Majipoor. Leavened with an ingeniously contrived cosmology and theology, the result is entrancing.

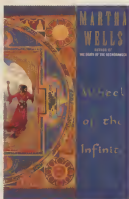
Into this setting, place an attractive middle-aged woman named Maskelle, on the run from her past for seven years, but now forced to confront what she fled. In her role as Voice of the Adversary, a high-placed functionary in the official church of the Celestial Empire, whose capital city is Duvalpore, Maskelle must show up for a rite that takes place every hundred years. A giant sand mandala mirroring the world must be constructed, or the very substance of creation will start to unravel. But this time around the mandala, the Wheel of the Infinite, suffers from a mysterious inexplicable blot—a disfigurement that will eventually cause weird physical eruptions in Duvalpore itself.

On the way home, travelling with a gaudy troupe of actors, Maskelle saves the life of a warrior named Rian, also a runaway from prior trouble, who becomes her bodyguard and lover. With a sometimes uneasy intimacy, they find themselves working as a team to frustrate the invasion of their world.

Wells has a knack for conjuring up spooky nemeses for the pair to face. She also flavors her book with elements of a detective story, adding an extra layer of intrigue. Her climax truly surprises, and moves the protagonists into unexpected territory. On the downside, the Emperor, who is also Maskelle's son, seems an underutilized character. And the occasional switches in point of view from Maskelle's eyes to Rian's seem almost superfluous and slightly distracting.

Overall, however, *Wheel of the Infinite* piles grain upon grain of highly colored sand to form an alluringly animated creation.

Paul Di Filippo



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Contributors

MAHENDRA SING was born in 1961 to a German mother and an Indian father. As a youth, he traveled extensively with his parents and was exposed to many cultures. His exotic heritage is reflected in the humorous, erotic and sometimes bizarre nature of his pen, ink and conte pencil renderings.

CAROL HEYER's book and magazine illustrations are featured in the publications of Hyperion/Disney Press, Orion Pictures, TSR, Ideals Children's Books, and Sovereign Media. She has recently completed her 14th children's picture book.

MARTY BAUMANN is the creator of *The Crater Kid*, a daily comic strip syndicated via the internet. His work has been favorably compared to the trendsetting EC Science Fiction comics of the 1950s. Baumann has an affinity for Roger Corman reruns and jazz and rhythm and blues.

JOHN PICACIO is a freelance illustrator who uses the collage and assemblage of mixed media and found objects to communicate about the world. He has illustrated for Random House, Mojo Press, and Night Shade Books and his latest work is the stunning jacket art for H.P. Somtow's *Tagging the Moon: Fairy Tales from L.A.* He lives in San Antonio, Texas.

KATE RIEDEL was born and raised in Minnesota and is now a card-carrying Canadian who lives in Toronto. Her short fiction has been published in *On Spec*, *Not One of Us*, and the anthology *Divine Realms*, as well as in *Realms of Fantasy*.

M.SHAYNE BELL has sold stories to *Interzone*, *Science Fiction Age*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and *Asimov's*. There are also stories forthcoming in various anthologies, including Ellen Datlow's *Vanishing Acts*. Gardner Dozois reprinted "Mrs. Lincoln's China" in Isaac Asimov's anthology *Mother's Day*. Although novels continue to languish on editor's desks in New York, 17 months and counting... stories are being translated and printed in Germany.

KAREN HABER is the author of eight novels. Her short fiction has appeared in *Asimov's*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and various anthologies. In her secret identity as an art journalist, she reviews art books for *Locust* and has profiled many of the top artists in the Sci Fi and Fantasy fields. She lives with her spouse, the writer Robert Silverberg in earthquake country near San Francisco.

ERIC BAKER was born in Reno, Nevada but has lived in Fairfax, Virginia since 1970. He holds a degree in English from Virginia Tech and a graduate of Clarion in 1989. Eric sold his first story in 1992, but it was his

third sale that appeared in print first. His work has appeared in *Amazing*, *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and *Science Fiction Age*. He has also written two modules for BRTC's *Time Lords* game system.

RICHARD PARKS is a Mississippi storyteller. Atypical of the breed, he cannot tell a lie with a straight face, and so he has to write them all down. Some of his better fits have appeared in *Asimov's*, *Science Fiction Age*, *Realms*, and *Dragon* magazines.

HEINZ INSU FENKL is the author of *Memories of my Ghost Brother*, an autobiographical novel about growing up as a biracial child in Korea in the 1960s. The son of a German-American soldier and a Korean black-marketeer, he was raised in Korea and in Germany, and in the U.S. He recently moved to New York with his wife, writer Annie B. Dalton, and their daughter.

MICHAEL GIBBS is a free-lance illustrator working in Alexandria, Virginia. His unique style combines traditional painting and digital media. Michael has been a regular contributor to *Realms of Fantasy* and has received both national and regional recognition for his work, including awards from the "Society of Illustrators," "Communication Arts," magazines and others. He is also the proud father of a three year old daughter.

JAMES VAN PELT teaches high school and college English in Western Colorado. His fiction has appeared in *Pulphouse*, *Aberrations*, and *Analog*. His stories have also twice been included in the honorable mention list of "The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror." James has published non-fiction essays in *Tangent* magazine that explored the effectiveness of professional writing affiliation, and the impact of mainstream influences in genre fiction.

GAHAN WILSON's cartoons are known chiefly because of his affiliation with "Playboy" magazine, but have shown up in periodicals as diverse as *The New Yorker*, *Weird Tales*, *Punch*, *Paris Match*, and the cover of *Newsweek*. Gahan is also a talented writer whose often-macabre fiction has appeared in *Omni*, and the original *Dangerous Visions*. Recent projects have included a CD-ROM entitled *Gahan Wilson's Ultimate Haunted House*, trading cards that feature demonic baseball players, and a telefilm for Showtime. He makes his home on Long Island.

TANITH LEE went to art college and worked in various jobs as a library assistant, waitress, and clerk until DAW Books published *The Birthgrave* in 1976. At that point, she became a full time professional writer. She has published over 150 short stories. She lives near the sea with her husband, writer John Kaine, and a cat. ■

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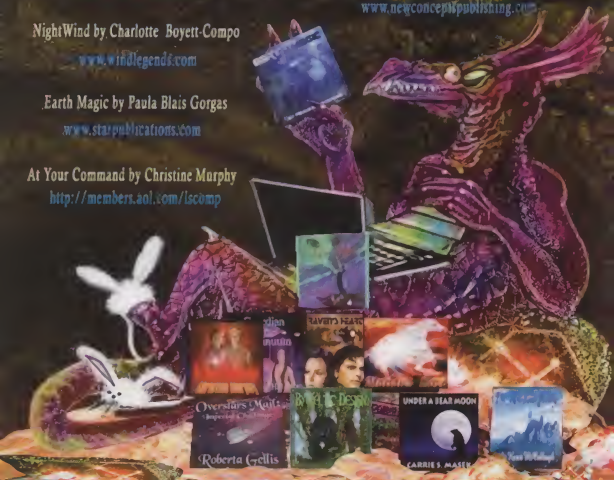
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